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THE CONFESSIONS OF GERALD ESTCOURT

BY

FLORENCE MARRYAT.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

"The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
Make instruments to scourge us."

Shakespeare.

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OF

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BY

FLORENCE MARRYAT,

AUTHOR OF "LOVE'S CONFLICT," "FOR EVER AND EVER."

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VOL. I.

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THE CONFESSIONS OF GERALD ESTCOURT.

CHAPTER I.

Extracts from the Diary of Lady Mary Estcourt.

"*Grasslands, Dorset, 1836.*

"*June 20th.* — I have been miserable to-day. It was such a lovely morning that Parton intended running up to town, and I had anticipated a long holiday with the dear children, and had even planned a little pic-nic to take place in the wood; but I am glad to say that I kept my design to myself, for Mrs. Estcourt drove over from Wiversdale with her daughter Susan directly after breakfast, with the evident intention of staying to luncheon, and all our arrangements were, of course, upset. Parton dawdled about until he lost the eleven o'clock express; and even had he gone, I suppose I should have been obliged to stay in and talk to the old lady. She asked for the children: the girls, as usual, openly showed their aversion to her (it is not my fault if they *will not* take to their grandmother), and poor Lascelles was shy and fractious, as he always is with any of the Wiversdale people. I tried to excuse his behaviour on the score of the hot weather,

which seems to have tried him very much; but Mrs. Estcourt laughed in the most uncivil manner at the bare idea. She has no sympathy with anything like weakness or delicacy, and imagines that everyone must enjoy the same rude health as herself.

"'You make a fool of the child,' she said, in her rough, coarse manner; 'you've nearly coddled him to death as it is. Sampson,' she continued, (why will she persist in calling my husband by his first name, when she knows how much he dislikes it?), 'when are you going to send this boy to school: it's high time, and he would be twice as well there as he is here.' Parton was rather ruffled with her at the moment, because she had just told him, when he asked her if she had seen his new book, that she never read such rubbish as novels, so he made no answer to her remark; but I am sure that he heard it, and I tremble lest he should act upon her advice. It is strange what an influence this old woman has over him, notwithstanding that they are always quarrelling with each other. I am sure she is at the bottom of his disagreements with myself, though he is hard enough to bear with, Heaven knows! — and I dread her entering the house, for she never does so without leaving some unpleasantness behind, in token of her visit. I mistrust my sisters-in-law also; I cannot open my mouth to speak but I feel their sly eyes are on me, ready to pounce upon and if possible misconstrue the meaning of every word I utter.

"I have not been well lately. The morning tour of duty fatigued me, and in the middle of luncheon I fainted. The first words I heard on reviving were, 'It's my belief, Lady Mary brings half of this on herself, Sampson. She coddles herself just as she does

that puny boy of yours, and with a little judgment it might be prevented. When did you ever see *me* faint?'

"Parton *had* the grace to tell his mother to hold her tongue, and I was naturally so indignant at what she had said, that I was glad of an excuse to leave the luncheon-room, and go to lie down upon my bed.

"Bring it on myself, indeed! I suppose she imagines that the Portsdowne blood is like her own! But she might make a little allowance for my not having been reared in the country amongst milkmaids and ploughboys. I was in hopes they would have left Grasslands without disturbing me further; but in another half-hour they all came trooping up to say 'goodbye,' Parton, it seemed, being about to accompany his mother and sister back to Wiversdale to dinner. He generally manages to leave the house when I need him most. As they were quitting the room, Susan Estcourt stopped to examine my favourite little model of the Corinth at Rome, which stood on the mantelpiece. She said she had never seen one so pretty before, evidently with a view to possessing it, for she knows her brother's disposition well.

"'Pray take it,' said Parton, 'it's of no use to us: you're very welcome to it.'

"My poor little model that he bought me himself on the occasion of our visiting Italy on our wedding tour; not that I value it for that reason, but I cannot bear that he should give away my things to Susan Estcourt. I sprung from the bed, saying quickly, 'Parton, that model is mine;' but he would not allow me to finish my sentence. 'Pooh, pooh,' he interrupted me with, 'I can get you another in London any day,

and Susan fancies it.' And then Mrs. Estcourt remarked that 'of course, if Susan fancied it, that would be an additional reason for Lady Mary to set store by it.' I was so angry that I had no words to answer her with; but I gave her a look which I think she will remember.

"How cruel these people are to me! How unjust, and how bitter! By what act have I ever incurred their resentment, except, indeed, by my marriage with Parton; and what right have these *parvenus* to cavil at that? I know the reason: they are jealous of me, and have been so ever since the day I had the misfortune to enter the family: jealous of my birth and my connections, so far above their own, and in their presence my husband forgets the means by which he has raised himself, and becomes jealous of them too. He shot an angry glance at me as his mother spoke; and taking my model off the mantelpiece, placed it in his sister's hands. Then Mrs. Estcourt smiled one of those triumphant, self-satisfied smiles which she always displays when she has come between my husband and myself, and the next minute they were gone. But they left me in one of my most despondent moods, and my health is so weak at the present moment that I seem to have no energy to shake them off."

"*June* 24*th*. — What I dreaded has come to pass! Parton told me this morning at breakfast that he intends sending Lascelles to school. He said that he had been thinking of it for some time; but I am sure that his mother has been speaking to him upon the subject. She knows how I am wrapt up in that boy, — how much dearer, on account of his extreme delicacy and

affection for myself, he is to me than my other children, — and she will glory in the idea of what I shall feel in parting with him. I did all I could to make Parton see the matter in the same light that I do. I represented to him that Lascelles' fragile constitution demands more care than can be accorded him in a school; that he is very unfit to associate with other boys; and that I thought, with our ample means, we ought to have a tutor for him, at least for some years to come. But I found him bent upon having his own way: obstinacy is one of the worst traits in Parton's character. He began to talk so loud and so fast that he silenced me. He was not going to have his only son, he said, turned into a milksop, and brought up at his mother's apron-string; he and his brothers had all been to public schools before Lascelles' age, and were none the worse for it, and the boy must fight his way through the world as his father had done before him.

"I could have reminded him that all the Estcourts were hardy boys and girls, and that my poor child had been reared to his present age with the greatest difficulty; but he would only have met me with the usual retort, that I had physicked him to the state he is in; so I changed the subject by asking if he had yet considered where he should place Lascelles. His answer was that he didn't know and he didn't care, his mother had promised to settle all that part of the business for him, and to find some school where the lad might be well looked after, and yet made a man of; and all I had to do was to see that his clothes were got ready for an immediate start.

"'But not yet, Parton,' I said; 'this is but the

24th of June, and no schools will reopen for a month to come.'

"'I know that,' he replied; 'but my mother wishes to have the boy at Wiversdale for a few weeks first; and as her favour may be of some importance to him in after life, I think it just as well to humour her in the desire.'

"I could control myself no longer; I burst out crying, and Parton laughed at my distress, until I completely lost my temper. I reproached him with cruelty to me and my children; with being himself at the mercy of every caprice of his mother; and wound up with a sarcasm relative to the probability of an *Estcourt* being capable of judging what kind of education was fit for a *Lascelles*. It was the worst card I could have played, and sealed my fate; for I know of old that nothing makes Parton so angry as any allusion to the difference of our birth. He behaved in the most ungentlemanlike manner; bade me remember, with an oath, that his children were *Estcourts* and not *Lascelles'*, and then proceeded to speak of the private character of my deceased father, and my brother Portsdowne, in a way that forced me to leave the breakfast-table, and I am afraid that nothing I could say now would shake his purpose. But my poor child! My poor Lascelles! I cannot get over the idea of parting with him. He is so young, only ten years old last birthday, and so tender that hitherto I have even been afraid of his visiting his grandparents at Wiversdale for fear he should be returned upon my hands ill; and now he is to be suddenly thrown into a whole school of healthy, hardy children to shift for himself as he best may.

When I think of it, I feel as if my heart would break!"

"*July* 1*st*. — This afternoon Mr. and Mrs. Estcourt drove over in their grand carriage, with its bay horses, and all its vulgar assumption of wealth, and took away my precious child. I had lain awake the whole of last night, thinking of the moment of parting, and wondering how I should ever get through it; but when the time really came I was too proud to show how much I felt. Dear Lascelles clung to me to the very last, and averred openly that he would not go to Wiversdale; but my mother-in-law's countenance was wearing its most self-satisfied air, and I would have died rather than let her see me shed a tear. She attempted to explain something to me respecting the school at which the child is to be placed, and the arrangements she had made for him, but I stopped her peremptorily. 'Your son has confided all such things to your judgment, Mrs. Estcourt,' said I, 'and I wish to hear nothing about them. What is necessary for me to know, Parton can tell me.' She shrugged her shoulders at my words, but only said in reply that if such was the case, she supposed there was nothing further to detain them, and therefore they would go. Even then she could not leave me without a parting sneer; for as I helped my boy into the carriage she said —

"'Place Lascelles, or whatever's his name, next to me. I cannot imagine why that child was not called Sampson, after his father.'

"If she has made this remark once since his birth, she has made it a hundred times. I could not resist saying, 'Lascelles is the family name of the Ports-

downes, madam, and therefore I should imagine it is good enough to be borne by your grandson.' And then I hurried into the house again.

"Yet my heart was very full; and when I had seen the last of my child's pale face, pressed against the carriage window pane, I felt as though I had parted with him for ever. He cannot write with ease yet; and were he able to do so, what could such a young creature tell me of the treatment he receives? This act on the part of my husband has hardened me. The natural grief of my heart at parting with my boy seems overridden and crushed by the more powerful feelings of hatred and a longing for revenge (all the stronger because I know them to be impotent), which I cannot help entertaining towards him, and her who has been his aider and abettor in the scheme."

"*July 2nd.* — Thinking of my little son, I passed a restless night, and my eyes this morning bore traces of the indulgence of my grief.

"I believe nothing makes Parton more angry than the sight of tears. He commenced to find fault with me directly he saw my face, and continued to do so until he had roused my temper, and we had a regular quarrel. Oh! when will these scenes cease! I feel sometimes as if I could bear them no longer.

"After breakfast, I strolled into the wood with my nurse and children, and sat upon a fallen tree whilst they ran about and picked wild flowers. What strong, healthy creatures my girls seem; the two eldest, Beatrice and Emmeline, are invariably taken for years older than they are; whilst the little ones are as ruddy and firm as peasants' children. I suppose it must be something in the blood they have inherited; but it is

only my poor Lascelles whose constitution is at all like my own. The time is drawing very near when I shall again be a mother. I wish for another son; but if he is to give me the care and anxiety that Lascelles has done, I trust that my child may prove a daughter. Yet, six daughters! the prospect is almost too much for one woman to contemplate."

"*August 9th.* — This day, a month ago, my baby was born; — a second son after all, but a very different specimen from the first. He is a splendid child, and I feel very proud of him; large and fat and strong, with dark eyes and a head of dark, curly hair. The nurse says, the finest baby she has ever seen. Parton was not with me at the time, as he had gone to Norway for a fortnight's fishing some days previously, but he seemed very much pleased when he returned home. Unfortunately Mrs. Estcourt took it into her head to nurse me during his absence, which greatly interfered with my comfort; and I fancy she must have perceived that I would rather be left by myself, for she did not prolong her stay beyond the third day. She had a battle-royal with her son, relative to the naming of the child, which amused me greatly. Parton has a predilection for pretty and aristocratic names; and as all the Estcourts bear particularly plain ones he has refused to call any of his children after his family. His own name is 'Sampson Parton Estcourt;' but, since he has become well known in the literary world, he has dropped the Sampson altogether, to the great indignation of his relations, who choose to think the act denotes that he has grown too proud to

permit them to use the more familiar appellation, which, however, they steadfastly refuse to drop. Mrs. Estcourt wished this baby to be called 'Jabez,' after old Mr. Estcourt. Imagine my beautiful, dark-eyed boy going through life with the name of 'Jabez!'

"But for once, I am thankful to say, Parton's wishes do not positively clash with mine. He holds out stoutly against having anything to do with his father's name. 'You will call him by another of the absurdly finikin names of the *Portsdownes* I suppose,' said his mother spitefully. 'I shall do no such thing,' he replied. 'I shall call him after my last hero, Gerald Trevor; will that please you?'

"Mrs. Estcourt almost screamed: she said it was a heathen name from a heathen book, and the clergyman who would baptize a Christian child after the hero of a novel ought to be stripped of his gown.

"The mother and son fought hard for upwards of an hour, but the contest ended, as it always does end, by Parton swearing frightfully and declaring that he would have his own way, whatever other people thought or said. And so my little beauty is to be called 'Gerald Estcourt;' rather a romantic name certainly, and if I had had my choice, I would rather have called him 'Francis,' after my own father; but I am so used to encounter opposition whenever I advance an opinion, that I said nothing on the subject, and anything is better than 'Jabez,' or knowing that Mrs. Estcourt has had her way in the matter. Finding that my husband was on indifferent terms with his mother, I ventured to put in a hint about Lascelles returning home; but on this point he is unnaturally obdurate. If he can be firm with her he can be cruel with me. I

have heard often of my absent child; he is at a school at Kensington, but London never agreed with him, and my heart is very sad about him at times."

* * * *

"*September 4th.* — Parton's new book, 'Gerald Trevor,' is making a great sensation in literary circles, and has been pronounced to be the cleverest hit of the season. I am surprised at his success, as I have never much admired his writing myself; but I trust that the fact of my little Gerald bearing the lucky hero's name may be an omen of good to him. But with each rise that Parton makes in the world the jealousy of his family increases, and appears to me invariably to vent itself upon my head, as if I was the cause of their offence. I have been in hot water at Wiversdale for the last month. Parton insisted upon my paying a visit there as soon as I was well enough to do so; and on one occasion I discovered that Susan Estcourt had been tampering with a letter of her brother's before she delivered it into my hands. I accused her of the fact before the assembled family, and appealed to Parton in writing for justification of my anger; but, as usual, he took his sister's part. He takes everybody's part but mine. He supposed Susan thought his letters were for her as much as for myself, and requested me not to make a noise about nothing. But I did make a noise about it, and I believe I said something to the effect that I ought to have known before I married what kind of treatment I might expect from my husband's family. I am not very clear as to what I *do* say when I am in a passion. I know the affair ended by Parton arriving in a hurry, and taking me back to

Grasslands, where he made my life miserable by his reproaches; and I have seen none of the Estcourts since. I am thankful for it. When will there be a stoppage to all this? I suppose it must end some day."

* * * *

"*November* 30*th.* — I have been grossly insulted; there is a point where human nature must turn, and I will bear this kind of thing no longer. My nurse came to me this morning, and asked me in a mysterious manner if I had heard that Master Lascelles was at Wiversdale.

"'Nonsense, nurse,' I exclaimed, 'you must be mistaken; Master Lascelles is at school at Kensington.'

"'Not now, ma'am,' the woman replied; 'he was sent to his grandmamma's ill, more than a week ago, and they tell me he is very bad.' She refused to give me the name of her informant, as she said it would be as much as her place was worth with 'the master' if it transpired that she had been the means of conveying the news to me. These servants all know on what terms Parton and I live together, and that my influence in the household is nothing compared to that of Mrs. Estcourt. As nurse concluded her statement, I was trembling with excitement and indignation, and hastily throwing on my bonnet and shawl, I told her to order the carriage to come round at once.

"'That's just what I hoped to see you do, ma'am,' she said on receiving the order; 'tell what lies they may, they can't deny as you've the best right to nurse your own child.'

"The 'best right!' yes, indeed, and the sole right, and I was determined to claim it. How *dared* they not

only remove my child from school without my knowledge, but keep him at Wiversdale, sick; and not even have the grace to let his mother know of his illness? My heart throbbed so violently as I drove along, that I could hear its pulsation; and my impatience was so great that I thought the ten miles which divided me from Lascelles would never be accomplished. But they were traversed at last; and as the door of Wiversdale Manor was opened to my summons, I rushed panting through the hall, and into the library, which is the general sitting-room. Mrs. Estcourt was there with her husband and her two unmarried daughters, Sarah and Susan.

"'Where is my child?' I exclaimed without any preface; 'where is Lascelles? I have come to fetch him home: how *dared* you keep from me the knowledge of his illness?' I suppose I looked like a tigress robbed of her whelps; I know I felt like one. My husband's mother rose slowly and confronted me.

"'What do you mean, Lady Mary, by this extraordinary ebullition?' she demanded.

"'Mean, madam! I mean that Lascelles is in this house, and that I will have him,' I answered angrily.

"'That you certainly shall not,' she said; 'Lascelles is here by his father's wish, and no one shall remove him without his father's sanction; added to which, he is not in a fit state to leave the house.'

"'Is he so *very* ill?' I demanded in a broken voice.

"'Seriously so,' was the measured reply.

"'Let me go to him,' I said wildly, attempting to leave the room, but Mrs. Estcourt placed herself between me and the door.

"'I can permit nothing of the kind,' she answered.

"'Do you intend to keep me from him?' I passionately exclaimed.

"'Most certainly,' was the reply; 'the child is suffering under an attack of scarlet fever, which is aggravated by inflammatory symptoms on the chest; and putting aside the danger of infection to yourself any agitation might be attended with serious consequences to him. Be reasonable, Lady Mary; the boy was sent here to save anxiety to yourself and risk to your other children, and it would be folly in you to insist upon undoing our precaution for the mere gratification of looking at Lascelles. All that can be done for him is being done, you may be assured of that.'

"But I felt, notwithstanding the apparent smoothness of her speech, that she was triumphing in her heart that she had got the upper hand of me.

"'Mr. Estcourt,' said I, turning to my father-in-law, 'will you permit me to be insulted in this manner in your own house?' but 'I never interfere, my dear, I never interfere,' was all the satisfaction I gained from appealing to him.

"'I will go to Parton,' I exclaimed (my husband is in London at the present moment). 'I will tell him how you have treated me, Mrs. Estcourt; indifferent as he is, he will not permit me to receive insult at your hands.'

"Then the woman dared to turn upon me; to tell me that my husband had married me for the sake of my rank alone, and that he had much better have been contented with a wife such as his brothers had chosen, for he had got a sorry bargain for his pains; that he was utterly indifferent to me; and that nothing I could

say would influence him if *she* chose to persuade him to act in a contrary direction. And all the time she spoke, Sarah and Susan were smiling in a furtive manner at one another across the library table, and the old man was shuffling about the room, evidently uneasy at what was going on, but afraid to put in a word that should further rouse the dominant spirit of his wife.

"As the bitter, mocking truths fell from her tongue, I could have struck her as she stood; and although I had no power to deny her statements, I gave her back word for word. Part of what she said I had known before; but to receive the account from the lips of one who should have died before she repeated such to me, was an indignity which I felt was not to be endured a second time. Trembling with passion, I left her presence, and, returning to Grasslands, hastily made such preparations as are necessary for a journey to London, whither I followed Parton the same night. I must have an explanation from him of this treatment, or place my case in the hands of some one more competent to judge for me than myself."

"*December* 1*st*. — Parton has rooms in the Albany when he stays in town alone, therefore I could not see him till this morning. He was astonished at my sudden appearance, and not over pleased; but I soon opened my mind to him, and asked him if it was by his desire that I was refused admittance to the bedside of my son. At first he was rather disposed to shuffle about the matter, and said that Lascelles had been sent to Wiversdale in the first instance to avoid alarming me, and now that the complaint had proved to be in-

fectious and dangerous, it was certainly not advisable that he should be moved; and that as to his mother's treatment of myself, I should remember the circumstances under which I last left her house. But this did not satisfy me.

"'I have come, Parton,' I said, 'to ask you a plain question. Am I to have my son under my own care as soon as he may be moved, or not; and in the meanwhile is it your wish that I am to be prevented seeing the child, because if so, I shall appeal to my own family against such treatment on the part of yours?' At this he flew into an awful rage; called me a fool for wishing to see Lascelles under such circumstances, and to run the risk of carrying the infection into my nursery; cursed and swore at every member of my family; and said that the boy being above seven years old no one but himself had legal right to control his actions. I told him how bitterly his mother had insulted me with regard to himself; and his passion was so ungovernable that he was shameless enough, not only to confess the truth of her statements, but to say that any other man would have acted in the same way who had been cursed with such a wife.

"He affirmed that under present circumstances we should never live together in peace, and that the best thing we could do was to separate. I retorted that if Lascelles was to be given up thenceforth to the guardianship of his grandmother, I should be the first to desire such a plan. He replied that the child was his own, and he should do what he chose with him; and that if I was not very careful I should never see his face again. I think I told him everything that was in

my mind, and then I went to consult my brother, Lord Portsdowne."

"*December 2nd.* — Portsdowne is very anxious that I should come to a compromise with Parton, and called on him this morning with a view to that end. But my husband steadfastly refuses to remove his son from Wiversdale; his senior brother is unmarried, and Lascelles being the eldest grandson, it is the evident intention of his father that he shall be brought up as the presumptive heir of Wiversdale, the estate being unentailed. He says that I am welcome to the guardianship of the younger children until such time as he may wish to have them to live with himself, and that if I consent to a private separation, he is willing to make me a suitable allowance for their maintenance and education. He told Portsdowne that he intends to let Grasslands, and settle in London. It appears to me that he has been planning this proposal for some time past. What shall I do? My brother urges me to seek a reconciliation; seems to imagine that I ought to rejoice at, rather than lament, the good fortune in store for Lascelles; ascribes this rupture to my own temper, and prophesies that I shall regret taking steps for a separation before the arrangement has been a month in force. But I differ from him. The vision of living in peace with my little children is very tempting to me, and Mrs. Estcourt will at least have the chagrin to know that I am beyond the shafts of her sarcasm. True, I shall not see my darling Lascelles; but what are the chances for my doing so did I remain? And I will never apologise to my husband's mother; which is one of the conditions he made of a reconciliation.

On the whole it is a difficult question. I have written to inform Parton that I will take a week to decide it."

"*December* 10*th*. — I am at Grasslands again, for the last time. For a week I have been holding communion with my own heart, and I have made up my mind; I will leave him.

"I have been passing in review all the events of my married life, and I find nothing to make me waver in my resolution. I am the mother of seven children: and, as far back as the date of my eldest daughter's birth, I can remember this house to have been the scene of constant wrangling, and often of serious quarrels. As the primary cause of all this, I reckon the influence, and unwarrantable interference of Mrs. Estcourt, added perhaps to an incompatibility of temper between Parton and myself, which was fatally apparent almost from our first acquaintance. He married me in order that my connections, added to his own talent, might raise him in the social scale above his fellows: and the consequence is, that jealousy of the society he mixes in, and the fame he has acquired, has established ill-feeling in the breasts of his less fortunate brothers and sisters, which, afraid on account of the firmness of his disposition, to show to himself, they have vented in the most cruel manner upon me.

"I have led a miserable life ever since I lowered myself by marrying him. I cannot amalgamate with these people nor take an interest in their pursuits; and their knowledge of the fact has so set them against me, that their ill-natured tongues would have separated Parton and myself, had not our opposite dispositions done so.

"However, it is of little use thinking of this now. My mind as to my future course of action is fully made up. I will not live longer with a man who has so little sense of the respect due to my birth, if not to my position as his wife. I will not have my children grow up beneath the influence of his example, and that of his family, when it is in my power to prevent it. Though they have the misfortune to bear the name of Estcourt, I cannot forget that they are the grandchildren of the Earl of Portsdowne. I have written this day to Parton, and to my brother, to say that I accept the offer of a separate maintenance. I shall be poor, it is true, but I shall be at peace."

"*January 2nd*, 1837. — This day I left Grasslands. Parton has not been home since I followed him to London, so all our arrangements have been made by letter.

"I am to receive from him an annual sum of three hundred pounds, which, with the interest of my marriage settlement, will secure me an income of seven hundred a year; little enough, compared with what I have been in the habit of enjoying, but ample for the quiet life which I hope to lead with my children. Portsdowne is very much annoyed, and disposed to be angry with me, for my decision; the cause, he maintains, not being sufficiently strong to warrant the effect, but he cannot know half the aggravation I have received.

"If any one could shake my resolution, my only brother would surely have the power to do so — for I am sisterless and an orphan, but I can be firm.

"The servants were very kind and respectful to me. I told them briefly that I was about to give up

the charge of Grasslands, and I think they sympathised with me, and doubtless guessed the cause. The nurses are the only ones whom I have brought away. The woman who informed me that Lascelles was at Wiversdale nearly upset my equanimity at the last moment, by mentioning his name. 'If Master Lascelles was only with us, ma'am,' she said, 'I shouldn't care for anything else.' How my heart echoed her words! The fact of leaving my precious boy behind was indeed the only thing which made me, once or twice, waver before coming to a final decision as to my own movements. How I longed to see him, if but for a moment, before I left Grasslands; but the idea of encountering Mrs. Estcourt again was more than I could venture to contemplate. He is better, thank God! I know that for a certainty, for one of my servants who had business at the Manor saw and spoke to him whilst passing through one of the corridors. I have no fear that they will not be kind to him: my bitterest thought is of the triumph which his grandmother will experience at what she will consider my defeat. However, I must try not to think of it, although my hatred of her comes between my prayers and heaven. He will never love her as he loves me, that is one comfort; and I have six children left.

"Yet, notwithstanding all the sternness of my resolutions, my mind would dwell on nothing else; and as I heard the clang with which the drive-gates of Grasslands shut behind me, I felt that, sooner or later, God's curse must descend on the heads of those who dare, by compulsion or otherwise, to separate a mother from the children she has brought into the world."

CHAPTER II.

I AM Gerald Estcourt. From the foregoing extracts from my mother's Diary it will be seen that the unhappy quarrels which separated my father and herself, for the remainder of their lifetime, commenced before my birth. Therefore I have no intention of animadverting here upon either their justice or their cause. *Qui legit, ipse judicet.* That faults existed upon both sides, there is little doubt; and that the effect of such faults held no slight influence over the lives of their children may readily be imagined when I state that I had nearly reached my eleventh year before I saw my father.

At that time I was living with my mother and three younger sisters at the quiet town of Guildford, in Surrey. The eldest, Beatrice, had just made a very distinguished marriage from her father's house in London, where the second, Emmeline, was then residing with him.

My third sister, Gertrude, was a pretty girl of about eighteen, who was anxiously waiting for her time to arrive to go through a London season; and the two youngest, Lilias and Marguerite, were still under the charge of a governess at home. I, for my part, was consigned for a portion of each day to the care of a neighbouring clergyman, and watched anxiously from my mother's house as I went to and from my tutor's, for fear I should speak to, or even look at, any of the

little dirty boys I might meet upon the road. As my sisters successively bloomed into womanhood, my mother was compelled with many tears to resign them during the season to the guardianship of their father, and to know that they took a share in gaieties of which she totally disapproved. I believe that she had always been remarkably strict upon this point even with regard to herself; but since her separation from her husband, her dislike of anything in the shape of pleasure almost amounted to intolerance. Hence our home was made so dull and uncongenial to us that we hailed the idea of anything like a change; and, notwithstanding the mysterious silence with which my mother always received any allusions to the doings of our unknown father, a visit to London was considered by us all much in the same light as a Mussulman thinks of Paradise; and I remember, young as I was, how I envied Beatrice and Emmeline (though I hardly knew for what) when those letters arrived which demanded their presence in town.

And yet I loved my mother, and had little pleasure in seeing her shed tears, and she returned my affection, although in a wayward, uncertain manner, as fondly as ever a woman did that of her child. But whether her knowledge of my father's temperament made her fear lest the same blood running in my veins might lead me into early excesses; or whether, foreseeing that the period would arrive when I should be removed from her influence, she hoped to inculcate sufficient morality to last a lifetime, I know not; but she was so exceedingly strict with me, that as soon as I had passed the age of infancy I commenced to droop and sicken of my life. I was allowed no playfellows

but my sisters, Lilias and Marguerite: a stand-up fight with a boy who insulted me on my way to school entailed a lecture on me which might have befitted a youthful murderer: whilst a slang word, picked up furtively in the street, was sufficient to insure me imprisonment in the house for many days afterwards. Brought up in this bread-and-butter style, I could not thrive. I was a strong, tall boy of my age, inheriting, I am glad to say, more of the red blood of the Estcourts than the blue blood of the Portsdownes, with sufficient energy in me for any amount of "larks;" and I used to look wistfully at the ragged urchins playing together in the roads, and long to join in their sports.

"Oh, I *wish* I was a blackguard," I sighed one day, to the infinite horror of my mother, who gravely reminded me that on her side I came from the blood of earls, and the only manner in which I could prove my right to so noble a descent was by being more of a gentleman than other boys, instead of less. I am afraid my poor mother sadly doubted on that occasion whether the current of my life had not by some accident been all derived from the "*parvenu*" Estcourts; but however sensible it may have been, her argument failed to convince me that I was wrong, and I still wished that I had been born a "blackguard."

Even the clergyman who gave me my daily instruction pitied me. I was, of course, his only pupil, my mother having made it a particular stipulation that such should be the case. But my tutor had sons of his own, although they were at that time grown up and out in the world; and I can recall the compassionate smile with which he would pat my head when,

having found me weary and disconsolate over my tasks and recommended me to lay the books on one side and go and have a good game of play, I used to sigh and answer him that I had "nobody to play with."

Once, two of his grandsons were expected to spend the day with him, and inadvertently he told me to ask my mother to let me join the party. But the bright flush of pleasure which mounted to my face at this proposal was quickly dispelled, when, at a look from his wife, he recalled his invitation with the words, "Better not, perhaps, though, dear boy, better not; Lady Mary is so *very* particular."

I remember how I went home that day (it was a dull November afternoon) and employed an hour before tea-time stoning the cats in the back garden from my bedroom window, and longing feverishly that either I had been born a girl, or that my sisters were boys like myself. Yet I never thought of blaming my mother as the cause of my solitary existence; I must do her the justice to say that she never spoke against my father in my hearing; and yet the very reticence which she displayed when his name was introduced, served to imbue me with the idea that it was in consequence of some fault of his, and not of ours, that we lived without him.

I was extremely innocent: she had taken good care that I should be so, and the subjects of marriage and divorce and separation were sealed mysteries to me; yet I knew that other children had fathers who lived in the same house, and loved them and were familiar with them; and the first query which assailed my

dawning intelligence was, "Why have not I a father who does the same?"

"Haven't I *ever* had a father, mother?" was one of the puzzles I offered for her solution in those baby days; and although, of later years, my sisters had considerably enlightened me on this point, my father still remained a visionary personage to me, and I often mourned the fact in secret, and wondered if it would ever be my lot to know him.

Not that we never heard of or from him at Guildford. The separation between my mother and himself having taken place by mutual consent he had not, once rid of her presence, cherished any violent antipathy to her.

Formal letters relative to their children, or money matters, passed between them at stated periods; and whenever my father was in a particularly good humour, or had made an uncommonly lucky hit with his writing, he used to be perfectly lavish in his expenditure on presents for us all; which presents my mother (being unable to distribute such handsome ones among us herself) was wont to regard with a very jealous and depreciative eye; and we quickly became aware that the sooner we packed away the contents of the boxes which came from London out of her sight, the better she would be pleased.

After having been once convinced, however, by the delight of receiving such tangible proofs of his existence, that I really had a male progenitor, and asked in vain for satisfaction as to what he had done that I never saw him, the next question which naturally arose was: "What is he like?" And when Beatrice or Emmeline returned for a few days to visit their mother, I used

to assail her privately for descriptions of his personal appearance, and was never tired of hearing how good-looking he was, how generous, and how clever. From such descriptions my fancy would build up an ideal of all that is most excellent in man, until I literally burned to escape from Guildford and the monotony of my daily life, and make the acquaintance of this unknown father in the unknown land he dwelt in.

Things were in this train when we received the news of my brother Lascelles' death. He had always been, I believe, of an excessively delicate constitution, and of late years had shown symptoms of pulmonary disease. He was taken ill at Woolwich, where he was prosecuting his studies for the army, and died in a few days of inflammation of the lungs. The announcement therefore was very sudden and unexpected. To my mother it was a blow which to her dying day she never forgot, for no amount of separation or length of time had sufficed to wean her from the devoted feeling which she had always entertained towards her eldest son, though how far that was nurtured by the intense jealousy which she experienced at my brother being brought up by Mrs. Estcourt of Wiversdale, it is difficult to determine. I remember the gloom which enveloped our house for many months afterwards, and how the slightest allusion to our dead brother would call down such torrents of tears on her part as I had never seen her display before. For my own part, I grieved little, for I had scarcely known Lascelles. He had once paid us a long visit when I was a child of four years old, but that had faded from my memory; and since he had commenced his education at a public school, we had never seen him for more than a few

days at a time, on which occasions he always appeared ill at ease, and as if he felt himself to be a stranger amongst us. The fact is, that notwithstanding all my mother's doubts to the contrary, Lascelles had been reared with great tenderness at Wiversdale, and what heart he possessed he kept for his grandparents and his father. But at the best he was a sickly, indifferent sort of lad; handsome with the beauty of a girl, but possessing little vitality or energy of purpose, and rather looked down upon by myself, even in the chrysalis state from which I viewed him. Consequently, except that it caused my mother's tears to flow, my brother's death concerned me little, for I was too young to feel the advantages which would accrue to me on account of it.

I have exonerated Lady Mary from ever attempting to prejudice me against my father, but I cannot say as much for her conduct respecting my grandmother, Mrs. Estcourt; for no "bogy" was ever held up as a greater object of terror to the minds of children than was the idea of the old lady at Wiversdale Manor held up to us. My mother could not restrain her anger against her. The story of how she had stolen my eldest brother was repeated until we learned to shrink together with fear, lest we also should be wrested from her arms; and the worst threat she could use to deter us from disobeying her commands was, that if we were not dutiful children she should send us to Wiversdale. Smarting under the knowledge of how Lascelles' affection had been lured from her, she tried to implant as strong a dislike of her husband's relations in the breasts of her remaining children as possible, lest they also should be won to love anybody

better than herself, a proceeding more politic in theory than in practice, for the affections will be their own judges. With regard to me, however, she need have been under no apprehension of Mrs. Estcourt entertaining too strong a predilection, for the time was fast approaching when the amiable disposition which my grandmother was pleased to display towards me was to have an opportunity of recommending itself to my notice.

At the period of which I now write, my mother's censures on the former doings and sayings of the family at Wiversdale had gained additional force from the fact that my father had once more taken up his residence at Grasslands, which had brought my elder sisters in contact with his relations. For some time after the dissolution of his household he had let his country seat, and taken up his abode entirely in town; but latterly he had been returned as member for the county of Dorset, and had, in consequence, reopened Grasslands with great festivities, accounts of which, from the lips of her daughters, doubtless rankled in the mind of my mother. She had given up all this luxury of her own free will, but she could not bring herself to forgive those who, she believed, had forced her to make such a decision, and whom her fancy pictured as triumphing in the fact that it was hers no longer.

One morning, about a year after we had received the announcement of Lascelles' death, I was preparing, as usual, to leave home for my tutor's house, when I heard sundry sounds of grief proceeding from the drawing-room. It was so common a thing now for me to see my mother cry, that I was proceeding on my

way without giving it another thought, when my sister Gertrude came to me in the hall.

"Wait a minute, Gerald; mamma wants to speak to you before you go."

"What's the row?" I demanded, rather irreverently.

"Only a letter from papa: I wish I were *you*," she answered, mysteriously.

"Gertrude, tell Gerald to come in here," said the broken voice of my mother, through the half-closed door.

I threw down my satchel of books, and obeyed her request, for my curiosity was roused. I found her standing by the mantelpiece, bathed in tears; and as I advanced to her side she placed her two hands on my shoulders, and looked me steadfastly in the face.

"Gerald!" she exclaimed, "do you want to leave me? will you desert your more than widowed mother, to be taught indifference towards her, as my poor Lascelles was?"

I did not guess what she was hinting at, and so I looked awkward, as boys will under such circumstances, and asked what I had done that she should put such questions to me.

"Your father has written to me to send you to Grasslands," she continued, with a fresh burst of tears as she crushed a letter which she held in her hand; "and he will take you to Wiversdale, and I shall never see you again."

"To Grasslands, mother!" I exclaimed, flushing to the roots of my hair with excitement, "how jolly!" but, then noting the bitter look of disappointment which stole over her face at my thoughtless words, I

added, penitently, "it won't be for long, you know, mother; I shall soon come back."

"I don't know that," she replied, rather coldly; "however, I dare say it will not make much difference to you, Gerald, whether you do, or not. Years of love and care have doubtless no weight in your mind, when placed in the balance against a few idle pleasures which I have not the means to afford you."

She was unjust to me then. I was an affectionate boy, and not likely to forget her; but my life at Guildford had been so devoid of all boyish pleasures that she might have forgiven me a transitory outburst of pleased surprise at the prospect of seeing a little of the world. Her words chilled me, and I hung my head, dispirited.

"It isn't that, mother," I said, sadly; "you know I shall always love you, but I've never seen my father, like Beatrice and Emmeline. I won't go if you don't wish it, mother."

"I *do* wish it, Gerald," she replied, more kindly (she did not think it necessary to tell me that she had no choice in the matter); "and I shall send you, as your father directs, next week. But remember this, my boy. If you go to Wiversdale Manor, and learn to love your grandmother and your aunts and uncles there, I shall never love you again. They have been my worst enemies, and those who care for them cannot care for me. Whenever you look at your grandmother, remember that she nearly broke your mother's heart, and that your aunts and uncles stood by, and laughed at it. If you do not, I shall never more call you a son of mine."

Her face was so earnest as she gave vent to this

speech that it sounded like an impending curse upon my head, and deeply impressed me.

"I won't, mother; indeed I won't!" I exclaimed fervently, clinging to her in a very childlike fashion; "and I will come back to you very soon, I will indeed, and never go away again."

She heaved a deep sigh, and gently unclasping my arms from about her neck, kissed and dismissed me to my studies. She knew how more than likely it was that, once broken loose from the home-nest, I should never be quite her own again.

There was not much preparation needed to render me fit for the anticipated visit, for my mother always dressed me like the son of a gentleman; and a few days after the conversation related above, I found myself, under the charge of a trustworthy servant, on my way to join my father at Grasslands.

CHAPTER III.

Until I left Guildford I did not dare give vent to my joy at the prospect before me, which was, however, extreme; but when I had once lost sight of my mother's grave face, and the sound of her despondent words, my happiness was boundless. The servant who accompanied me had orders to take me only as far as London, and see me safely into the Dorsetshire train, therefore the last half of my journey was performed alone. My excitement was so great that I remember nothing that occurred upon the way, excepting that I greatly astonished some ladies in the same railway carriage by the gratuitous information that I was travelling down to see my father for the first time in my life; and the answers I gave to subsequent questions which they put to me must have considerably enlightened them as to portions of my family history. Although I had been brought up in such a secluded manner, I was not at all a shy boy; and on my arrival at the station at which it had been impressed upon me that I must get out, I jumped upon the platform and looked round in the most independent manner, to ascertain who had been sent to meet me.

I expected to see some man or perhaps woman servant advance to ask me my name; but I was scarcely prepared for the appearance of a flunkey, dressed in an extravagant livery of drab and gold colour, who, saying confidently "Mr. Gerald Estcourt?

this way, sir," led me through the unpretending little station-room to the road beyond, where was standing a carriage, and pair of bay horses. The door being thrown open I sprung in, and found myself in the arms of my sister Emmeline.

"My darling boy," she exclaimed (I was always terribly spoilt by my sisters), "I am so delighted to see you here! Home, John," and in another minute we were rolling onwards towards Grasslands. It was all like a dream to me, a wonderful dream of happiness and magnificence; and I suppose my feelings were depicted on my countenance, for my sister laughed at my surprise, as she sat with her arm encircling my waist.

"You mustn't look so astonished, Gerald," she said presently; "this is nothing to what you will see at Grasslands. You can have no idea of the style in which papa lives. He has been so anxious about your arrival; I am sure he was quite nervous to-day at the idea of meeting you, for he would not come to the station with me. He expects great things of you, Gerald. I hope he may not be disappointed."

"Great things of *me*, Emmy," I said; "but why?"

"You are his only son now, Gerald, remember: since poor Lascelles is gone, he has no one to look to but yourself to carry on the family name."

This was the first notion which had been given me that individually I was of importance to my father; and the idea of carrying on the family name made me hold my boyish head an inch higher, even as I sat by my sister's side.

"Do you think my father cares for me, Emmy?" I asked, after a pause.

"I am sure he does, Gerald," she replied.

Here was another new idea. Hitherto, all my thoughts concerning my father had been concentrated upon his ability to give me handsome presents, and the pride I should feel in seeing how others admired his person and his genius. I had never before dreamt of him as loving me, but my sister's words made my heart warm towards him at once.

"I hope that you will love him also, dear," she continued.

"I *do*, Emmy; I love him now," I replied, with eagerness.

Then she went on to tell me of the visitors who were staying at Grasslands, amongst the foremost of whom was my newly-married sister, Beatrice, with her husband, Lord Henry Claremont. From Emmeline's description it appeared to my inexperienced mind as if the house must be quite full, and I anxiously demanded whether there were any boys amongst the guests.

"No boys young enough to suit your taste, I am afraid, Gerald," she replied, laughing; "but don't be alarmed, we will get you some playfellows by-and-by, and in the meanwhile papa will let you do exactly as you like. He is as kind and indulgent as he can be. He has bought the most beautiful little pony for you to ride, and I dare say you will be out with him half the day."

The prospect of the pony completely subdued me, and I am afraid that until we reached Grasslands it occupied my thoughts even to the exclusion of the meeting with my father. However, the opening of the drive-gates recalled me to myself; and so agitated did

I become that I doubt if I noticed any part of the beautiful grounds which formed the approach to the hall. As soon as the carriage steps were let down, I eagerly followed my sister into the house, when, seizing my hand, she drew me after her into a small octagonal room, which was my father's study.

Standing with his back to the mantelpiece, and his hands under his coat tails (although it was summer weather and no fire was in the grate), was a fine upright man of about five-and-fifty years of age, with grey hair and florid complexion, whose dark eyes seemed so familiar to me that I felt at once it must have been from him that I derived my own.

"Here is Gerald, papa!" exclaimed Emmeline, as she led me forward. I fancied there was a nervously expectant tone in her voice, as if she was not quite certain what my father would think of me; but if it was the case, her fears must have been soon set at rest, for he took his hands quickly from beneath his coat tails, and starting forwards, seized me by the shoulders and drew me to the light.

"Good God!" he exclaimed, with a look of pleasant surprise, "is this he? I had no idea he would be so tall — why, he is an Estcourt all over." And then suddenly releasing me, he held out both his hands and shook mine warmly. "And how are you, my fine fellow?" he demanded, looking me affectionately in the face.

"Quite well, father," I answered, with my eyes fixed scrutinizingly upon his own features.

"He has a look of poor Lascelles, Emmeline!" he said presently, when he had done surveying me.

"Do you think so, papa?" she replied dubiously.

"Well, perhaps not, my dear; I may be mistaken: but I thought the features were somewhat similar. Take the youngster away with you, and let him have something to eat after his journey."

I was unwilling that the interview should end so quickly; and as my sister prepared to obey the injunction she had received, I pushed her from me.

"I don't want to go with you, Emmy," I said; "I want to stop with my father."

He seemed pleased at this; and she laughed and left the room without me. When she was gone, my father closed the door after her and approached the spot where I stood.

"What makes you want to stay with me, boy?" he said, quietly; "you can't care for me."

"Yes, I do!" I answered, stoutly.

"But why? you have never seen me before."

"Aren't you my father?" I demanded, looking up in his face.

"Well, I believe so," was his reply.

"Then, *that's why*," I conclusively answered; "don't you care for *me?*"

He stooped quickly and kissed me on the forehead, almost as tenderly as my mother might have done. It was the first and last kiss that I ever remember to have received from him, and, as I afterwards learnt, was a very rare sign of affection for him to manifest.

"Of course I do," he said, in answer to my question; "and now, young shaver, just cut out of my room, will you, and don't make a fool of yourself."

I never again alluded to the subject of my father's love for me, either in his presence or in that of an-

other; but I knew that it existed, and from that day my heart was warmly knit to his.

Finding that my sister's assertions were true, and that it appeared likely any amount of liberty would be granted me at Grasslands, I spent the remainder of the day in tearing over the house and grounds, and by the time that the late dinner was served, had made acquaintance with every horse in the stables and every dog upon the premises; and was as perfectly at my ease as it was right that the heir to all the treasures I had been inspecting should be.

I had always been accustomed at Guildford to dine early with my mother and sisters, therefore the late repast was in itself a novelty to me, and the number of strangers amongst whom I found myself a still greater one.

When I entered the drawing-room, rather sheepishly I must confess, notwithstanding the courage I had been displaying outside, I found my two sisters doing the honours of Grasslands to some thirty or forty people, half of whom were my father's resident guests, and most of them distinguished in literature, science, or art.

Parton Estcourt, M.P., and the most powerful author of the day, was a very different person from the Parton Estcourt who had been so eager to marry the daughter of the Earl of Portsdowne in order to raise himself in the scale of society; and indeed the whole of his family, partly on account of his popularity, and partly on account of their great wealth, had since then risen in the world.

The fact is, my father's parents were not *parvenus*,

as my mother bitterly termed them, but descendants of a good old English family, who had made their money by city trade; and all the sons, with the exception of himself, had been brought up to the same calling as their father. The first grand quarrel on record between Parton Estcourt and his mother was on the occasion of his steadfast refusal to enter a merchant's office. He was then very young; but he already felt the *divine afflatus*, and he resolved that his talent should do more for him than money can, and raise him to the position to which he aspired. His first attempts were favourably reviewed, and he began to be talked of and to receive introductions to great persons, and invitations to houses where he had never set foot before. Thus he met my mother, and whether they loved each other or not, she consented to marry him, and his union with Lady Mary Lascelles gave him a lift in the social scale, which his subsequent separation from her was powerless to undo. Then came in a rush, fame, popularity, and attendant wealth, until he stood, at middle age, a *made man;* made by his own exertions, whilst his immediate relations remained, with the exception of their yearly increasing riches, in much the same position as when they started in life; and although they never hesitated to partake of my father's hospitality or to make use of his interest, their jealousy and heart-burning in the contemplation of his success exceeded description. All this, however, I learned afterwards; my first impression on entering that drawing-room being simply that I had never seen so many pretty ladies and so many gentlemen with bald heads together in my life before. As soon as I made my appearance, my father left a crowd of men about the

hearthrug, with whom he was conversing, and, taking my hand, led me into their midst.

"Baynes," he said, to a white-haired old gentleman who looked like a general, "this is my boy;" "Lord Manners," to another of his friends, "let me introduce Mr. Gerald Estcourt to your notice;" "Jabez! allow me to present to you my son and heir."

"Fine lad," said the general, approvingly.

"Very! — chip of the old block," quoth his Lordship.

"Humph!" growled the gentleman whom my father had addressed by his Christian name, and who proved to be my senior uncle, Jabez Estcourt. He was a stout, red-faced man, considerably shorter than his brother, and regarded me much in the same manner as he would have examined prize stock at a cattle show. His look and his growl, added to the remembrance of my mother's caution, put me on my mettle, and I turned my back to him, before he had completed his survey. My sister, Lady Henry Claremont, then beckoned me to her side, and made me known to my brother-in-law, whom I had not seen before. She was an amiable girl, and very tender in her manners towards me, and he was a fine bluff young fellow who was too good-natured to snub a boy. So they kept me beside them, and laughed and joked with me until dinner was announced, when I went downstairs hanging on my sister's bare arm, which made a certain Captain Talbot, who took her in to tinner, say I was a lucky young dog. I did not understand the joke, nor see the particular "luck" of having a sister, but I laughed as in duty bound, and clasped my hands tighter together. Beatrice and Captain Talbot seated me be-

tween them, and plied me with kindness and good things; until, after a glass or two of wine to which I was unaccustomed, my spirits got the better of me, and I laughed and talked loud enough to be heard by every one at table. Presently, as I was giving my neighbour some lively details of my Guildford existence, I mentioned my mother's name —

"Mamma's awfully particular (I've got a mother living at Guildford you know)," I said, looking up in the officer's face. I observed that he bent his eyes upon his plate when I mentioned the fact, and I felt Beatrice's foot press mine beneath the table, but I did not catch the import of these signs, and went on rapidly with my subject.

"Well, she's awfully particular, you know; she never lets me go with other boys, for fear I should learn to swear, or something of the sort, and she's so afraid of tipsy men. You should just see mamma cut across the road if she sees a man coming who doesn't walk quite straight; not a bit drunk you know, it's such fun! but one day when mamma and I —" At this juncture I heard my father cough audibly, and looking up, I perceived Emmeline regarding me fixedly from the other side of the table, and I guessed something was wrong. I thought I had been talking too much, particularly as Beatrice whispered to me to be quiet; so I remained so for the next quarter of an hour. But at the expiration of that time, my new friend Captain Talbot, pitying what he thought my discomfiture, and re-engaging me in conversation, I unfortunately reverted to the forbidden topic.

"Mamma always says —" I was informing him,

when the voice of my father came stern and powerful from the bottom of the table —

"Gerald! hold your tongue; you talk a great deal too much."

The tone was so severe that it completely silenced me, and whilst the ladies remained with us, I did not again venture to open my mouth. When they had left the room, however, my father beckoned me to his side, where he kept me for the next hour, loading my plate with everything that was on the table. It was his method of silent intimation that he was no longer angry with me, and I accepted it as such, and preferred it greatly to anything like an explanation.

But after I had gone to bed that evening my sister Emmeline came into my room. She said she did so because my mother had always been in the habit of visiting me the last thing at night, and she thought, everything at Grasslands being so strange, that I might miss it. "Not that I intend to come every night, Gerald," she added, smiling; "you are growing into such a man now, that you must learn to take care of yourself."

I rolled myself round like a chrysalis in the bedclothes, and said proudly that I was quite able to do so at the present moment, and that I didn't want any women to come bothering in my room, when I wished to go to sleep.

She laughed lightly as I spoke, and seated herself upon a corner of my bed. She was still dressed in her evening attire, and I remember wondering why she sat there crushing her flowers instead of going to bed herself. Presently she spoke again, but almost timidly —

"Gerald, dear, papa has asked me to speak to you

about something. He doesn't like to do it himself, for fear you might think that he was finding fault too soon."

"What is it?" I asked, unrolling in my surprise.

"It's about mamma, dear. Of course, having lived with her so long, you can't help thinking of her; but whilst you are at Grasslands you mustn't mention her name as you did to-day at dinner-time. It vexes papa very much, and it will make him angry if you do it again."

"Was it *that* which made him speak so crossly to me, Emmy?"

I was astonished beyond measure. In my mother's house although, as I have said, the subject was evidently an unpalatable one, yet we had never been actually forbidden to mention my father's name; on the contrary, we often discussed it in her presence, though she never gave us any voluntary information respecting it. That *hers* was to be a sealed topic at Grasslands had never entered my imagination as likely, and my eyes must have shown the surprise I felt at my sister's communication. She did not answer my last question except by a nod, but continued to sit on the bed with her glance bent sadly on the ground.

"Has mamma been *wicked*, Emmy," I asked in an awed whisper, "that I mustn't even say her name here? Is that why father never came to see us at Guildford, and why we have such a little house, and he has such a large one?"

"Hush! hush! Gerald. No, it's not that. You do not understand the case, dear boy, but I think it is time that you should. Listen to me, and I will try to explain to you how it all occurred."

And then she related how my father and mother had married and hoped to live happily together all their lives, but that quarrels and misunderstandings had arisen between them, until they considered it better to live in different places, and not to see one another at all, and that was the reason that it gave my father pain to hear her named amongst his guests.

"If all was right between them, Gerald, as it ought to be," said my sister in conclusion, "poor mamma would of course be at the head of the table, but as it is, the only thing to do is to try and forget that she is not there. You see now why you must be careful in future not to revive so disagreeable a topic at Grass-lands."

She cried whilst she told me this, and when she had ended her story, my eyes were also moist, although I was ashamed that she should see it. I had partly guessed the truth, but it was the first time that the cause of my parents' separation had been revealed to me; and notwithstanding the admiring affection which my heart had suddenly conceived for my father, my sympathies for the time being were all with my absent mother.

"But if they were *both* wrong, Emmy, as they must have been to quarrel with each other till they were obliged to live in separate houses, why didn't they each take half the pictures and things? why has my father got so much and my mother so little? We have no carriage or horses at Guildford: the furniture of our house is quite old compared to this; and we have scarcely any pictures, and only three servants. When people marry, don't they promise to share everything

together; why should there be such a difference between them?"

I put the question in good faith, sitting up in bed, and looking earnestly at Emmeline for an answer; but it never came. She only said from behind her handkerchief —

"Oh! don't ask me such things, Gerald; it's the law of the land, dear: beyond your understanding or mine."

"Will it never be right, Emmy?" I whispered. "Will poor mamma never come back to live at Grasslands?"

She shook her head.

"I know who did it," I said angrily, clenching my fist; "I know it is all grandmamma's fault; if she hadn't been so unkind, mamma would never have gone to live at that horrid Guildford."

"Who told you that, Gerald?" demanded my sister, in surprise.

"No one, but I guessed it, for mamma told me that she was her worst enemy, and that she nearly broke her heart. I *hate* her, Emmy; and when I see her I shall tell her so."

"No, no, Gerald! you mustn't do that, or you will make papa still more angry with you. It is a great misfortune for us all, dear; but the only thing we can do now is to make the best of it, and to live at peace with our relations. Papa has had a great deal of trouble lately, Gerald: he felt poor Lascelles' death very much, and I know he wants them to take kindly to you at Wiversdale. You won't be a naughty boy and disappoint him, will you?"

"Well, I won't tell grandmamma I hate her, then,"

I said, firmly; "but I shall never love her because she was so unkind to poor mamma."

"I don't think you will, Gerald," replied my sister, more cheerfully, as she prepared to leave me. "If you do, you will be very different from the rest of us, always excepting poor Lascelles; but keep the peace as long as you can, for papa's sake;" and kissing me lightly on the forehead, she left the room. But far into the night, I lay awake pondering on the account which I had heard of my parents' separation, and the reason of the great inequality in their establishments. The question puzzled me; it was my first insight to the law of England as exhibited in favour of men *versus* women.

CHAPTER IV.

THE subject of my *lapsus linguæ* on the occasion of my first appearance at the dinner table at Grasslands was not again reverted to; and in a few days I had not only forgotten the annoyance it caused me, but, what was more to the purpose, had learned to throw the things of the past behind my back, at all events when in my father's presence. And in the meanwhile, time was flying by me with lightning speed. The morning after my arrival, my father gave me my first lesson in riding on the pony he had purchased for my use; and from the moment that I could keep my seat in the saddle, I was always by his side. He was exceedingly kind to me, but he was also exceedingly careless; and loitering with him and his guests about the stables and the farm, my boyish understanding received more enlightenment on the wickedness of the world in one week, than it had done in the course of eleven years spent under the shadow of my mother's wing. I was not forbidden to write to her; and the long letters I scrawled privately in my bedroom contained such glowing acccunts of my pony and my dog, of the pistols my father had given me, and of my learning to shoot at a mark, that I fear, on retrospection, their receipt must have given the poor soul many a heartache. Yet I was but a child, living in the present, and dazzled by the unusual luxury by which

I was surrounded; and in my anxiety to impart the happiness I felt to the person with whom I was most familiar, I forgot that these were the very temptations which she so feared would lure my heart from her. Not that any amount of pleasure could have accomplished that, but certainly, whilst ambling on my pony by the side of my father's hunter, if the thought of soon returning to my dull, uninteresting life at Guildford crossed my mind, I used to wish, not that I might never go back to my mother, far from it! but only that she could come to live at Grasslands, and be as happy as I was then.

When I had been there about a week, I heard one morning at breakfast that we were going to spend the day at Wiversdale Manor, to attend a private flower-show which was to be held in the grounds, and at which a large assemblage was expected to be present. The gardens and park which surrounded my grandfather's house were very extensive; and nothing pleased his wife better than to lend them for such purposes as a fancy bazaar or public fête of any kind, which should draw the county families together as partakers of her hospitality; and as it was a break to the monotony of a country visit, my father proposed, on the present occasion, to take all his guests over to see the show. Just before we started, my sister Emmeline came to my room where I had retired for the purpose of dressing. I had never had the felicity then of attending a botanical fête at the Horticultural Gardens, and therefore I was very naturally astounded at the magnificence of her preparations for my grandmother's flower-show. Roses were in her bonnet and her bosom; and her form appeared to be shrouded in white lace and muslin. So

that, in my innocence, I thought she looked much fitter to attend a wedding than a country gathering.

"What a swell you are, Emmy!" I exclaimed.

"Am I?" she said, carelessly. "Gerald, I only came to ask you one thing; you will not forget what we talked about the first night you came here."

I gave her my promise, and she hurried away; but her appearance had made an alteration in my own plans.

Laying aside the plain tweed clothes with which I had invested myself, I substituted for them a suit of black velvet, arguing that if my sisters thought it necessary to attire themselves so elegantly, it was my part to see that I was dressed in a corresponding manner. As I joined the party downstairs, my father eyed me approvingly; and having handed some of the ladies into an open barouche, told me to jump up on the box-seat of the drag in which he was about to drive the remainder of his guests. This was a rare treat for me: nothing made me so proud of my father as to see the manner in which he handled the ribbons of his four-in-hand; and I watched so carefully every movement of his fingers, and talked so animatedly with him on the subject of driving, that he was quite delighted, and swore he would see me drive the drag myself before I left Grasslands.

On the road, jogging along on a stout shooting pony, we passed my uncle Jabez, who, although he was a guest at Grasslands, had refused to go to Wiversdale in either the barouche or the drag.

I had taken a dislike to this brother of my father's, for during the short time that I had spent in his company, he had scarcely ever noticed me except by a

grunt; and as we now flew past him in a cloud of summer dust, and my father lightly raised his whip hand in token of recognition, he neither answered him by sign nor look, but kept solemnly jogging along the side of the hard road, turning neither to the right hand or to the left.

"Uncle Jabez must have seen us," I said, glancing at my father's face.

"He saw us fast enough," was the smiling reply.

"Why doesn't he like you, father?" I asked, boldly.

"How do you know that he doesn't like me, my boy?"

"Because he's so cross, and so grumpy," I said, knitting my brows; "and the more we laugh and talk, and the happier we are, the grumpier he seems. He can't like us, father; why doesn't he go home?"

At this ingenuous question my father laughed heartily — so heartily that it was some minutes before he could answer me; but when he had regained his composure, he said —

"There are a good many excuses for your uncle, Gerald. In the first place he has never married; he has consequently no children, and that has been a disappointment to him: in the second, I, his younger brother, have outstripped him in the world and placed myself in a better position than his, and that is galling to a man. It's the fate of the lucky, Gerald, to excite all manner of evil passions in the breasts of those who are not so prosperous, and it has been my ill fortune to do so amongst such as are nearest to me. I am afraid as you mix amongst your relations, my boy,

that you will find the feeling of jealousy against ourselves is not confined to the first generation."

"Most of them are as rich as you are, aren't they?" I inquired.

"Much richer, Gerald, only I like to spend my money and they prefer to save theirs; but it is not a question of mere riches. Wealth alone will not procure them what is to me enjoyment; the society of men and women in a grade of life higher than my own, and the *entrée* to houses where I am welcomed for the sake of the fame I have acquired. There's the rub, Gerald. My brothers have made their fortunes by their hands, and I have made mine by my head, and in the eyes of the world there's a vast difference between the two modes of production. I tell you this, not to make you think yourself better than your relatives, for we are all of the same blood, but that you may remember it in years to come. I want you to follow my example. I shall give you a profession certainly, because no man should be without one; but I hope that you will always consider that you are bound, if possible, to a literary life; to keep up the name which your father has made for you, and to leave your children one that, in their turn, they may be proud of. Let every step you take in life be taken with the idea of raising the family, not lowering it. We'll have no more trade in our branch, my boy, either by blood or connection."

My father stopped talking, and appeared to be lost in a reverie caused by his own words. I touched him on the arm.

"I want to be a soldier, father."

He started and looked pleased.

"And so you shall, Gerald; you shall be anything

you choose, soldier or sailor, so long as you are a gentleman. Not an idle, fine gentleman, mind: a shopkeeper would be preferable to that. I have ample means to set you going in the world, without lifting a finger to help yourself, but I shall not do so. Head before hands, my boy, by all manner of means; but work before everything — never forget what I say. An energetic mind will carve out work for itself even where there is no necessity for labour, from the sheer necessity for action making itself known in its nature. And hereafter you will occupy an important place in the family, Gerald. Failing offspring of your uncle Jabez, you are eldest son of the eldest son; you will not be able to afford to commit one action that will not bear the light of the world's bull's-eye turned upon it; a false step from you will jeopardise the credit of the whole race. It is a great thing to stand in the position you have acquired through the death of your poor brother; but you will have need of plenty of circumspection and right judgment to maintain it without having your head turned. But here am I, forgetting that you are only eleven years old, and talking to you as if you were a man of one-and-twenty."

"But I can understand you, father," I urged, "and I like to hear you talk."

"All the better, Gerald; if you can understand the theory now, perhaps you'll undertake the practice later. But we have had enough of it for to-day. Another ten minutes will bring us to Wiversdale."

Wiversdale Manor was a huge erection of red bricks, built to commemorate the Elizabethan era — ugly, clumsy, and incommodious. I thought it so on my first acquaintance, and I often wonder to this day

why people professing good taste will persist in reviving the imperfections of a bygone age, which ought to have been buried with their designers. As the drag and barouche drew up at the door of the Manor, and the ladies in all their bravery were alighting, my father still kept me close to his side and would not permit me to enter the house without him. He was evidently determined to be the first to introduce me to the notice of his family. When the whole party was ready, we proceeded to the library, where we were informed that Mrs. Estcourt was awaiting us. Lady Henry Claremont and Emmeline were in advance as they had to introduce several of the guests from Grasslands to their grandmother; my father and I brought up the rear.

On entering the room, the first figure which struck me was that of my grandmother, and whilst the introductions were going on, I had full opportunity of examining it. She was a fine, tall old woman, of perhaps seventy-five years of age, upright as a dart, and with a most imposing figure. Her complexion was still remarkably fresh, which was made more apparent by the silvery white curls which lay on her forehead; and she was dressed in grey satin, with a very full cap of white lace and ribbons surrounding her face. As my sister mentioned the names of the ladies and gentlemen who accompanied them, I saw the lines and muscles of my grandmother's features relax, until she gave vent to that peculiar self-satisfied smile, which in after years I came to know so well. Glancing towards a sofa near her, I perceived two hard-featured, middle-aged females, with high cheek-bones, bearing an uncomfortable resemblance to one another, but none at all to the rest of the family: these were my spinster aunts, Sarah and

Susan, who had not yet found any one bold enough to transplant them from the home nursery. At the further end of the long room was a lady in such plain attire, that it scarcely seemed as though she could intend mixing in so gay a scene; and at first I thought she must be the nurse of the lanky red-haired lad, of about my own age whom she held on her knee, and about whose freckled face was bound a white pocket handkerchief. But I afterwards learnt that she was my aunt Anne, the wife of Mr. Logan, a City stockbroker; that she despised the vanities of this world too much ever to appear out of cotton or linsey-wolsey; and that the red-haired boy was her youngest son, Thomas Logan, of whom I shall have more to say by-and-by. With the quickness of a child, I had taken in all this, before my turn came to be presented to Mrs. Estcourt. Notwithstanding the graciousness of her smiles to my father's guests, I had noted the "sniff" with which she had greeted my sisters; and as I now advanced it did not appear as if she was disposed to give me a much more favourable reception.

"Mother!" said my father rather bluntly (all the Estcourts were blunt in their speech), "here is my son Gerald, whom I trust some day to see the head of the family, so I hope you will be good friends with him."

"Humph!" said my grandmother; "some day is no day." With closed eyes and the corners of her mouth turned down, she then presented her face for me to kiss. I stood on tiptoe, and perceiving various little silvery bristles springing up about her chin, made a shot for a smooth place, and lighted just upon the ribbon which crossed her ear. Then she opened her eyes and condescended to look at me.

"Do you see any likeness to poor Lascelles?" asked my father in a low tone, as she scanned my physiognomy.

"Pooh!" she said rudely, "not the least: he's just like Anne."

"What Anne?" I demanded with surprise.

"Your sister, Lady Henry," replied my grandmother, with much acerbity in the pronunciation of the title.

"She's not *Anne*," I said indignantly, "her name is Beatrice."

Now my eldest sister's name was "Beatrice Anne," but she had never been called by the second title except by Mrs. Estcourt; and it appeared that her pertinacity in mentioning the girl by no other name, had devolved into a joke at Grasslands. But of this I was unaware.

"*You* may not call her *Anne*," replied my grandmother, testily; "but it is her name, nevertheless, and a very pretty name too, and far more suitable for a young woman, in my opinion, than any of the fiddle-faddle names of the present day."

A storm appeared to be brewing; and Emmeline, who possessed the sweetest of tempers, thought to avert it by remarking playfully —

"Well! if second names are to be the order of the day, grandmamma, I suppose I must drop 'Emmeline,' and be known as 'Mary.'"

"I hate 'Mary!'" retorted my grandmother, sharply.

"It's mamma's name!" I exclaimed, firing up, "and I *love* it."

All that I had heard concerning the cruelty of the old lady before me towards my mother flashed into my mind, and I dare say I looked as indignant as I felt.

"Hoity toity, young man!" said my grandmother, peering at me over her spectacles, "I don't think your manners say much for your bringing-up."

I was sorry I had spoken then, and glanced timidly at my father to see what effect my careless words might have had upon him; but he had turned in my defence upon Mrs. Estcourt.

"Then what on earth induced you to speak in that way before the child? Gerald! go into the garden with Emmeline; I shall see you there by-and-by;" and as I left the room, he continued, angrily, "You'll find, mother, that that boy has inherited a goodly spice of the family devil, and is not to be twisted round a finger. He is very different from poor Lascelles." I heard no more, for I followed my sisters and their friends into the grounds of Wiversdale, where the gay scene I witnessed soon drove the memory of my grandmother's reception out of my head. Erected on the lawn which stretched at the back of the house were two or three large marquees, filled with contributions of fruit, flowers, and vegetables, from the best gardens in Dorset; whilst scattered over the adjoining park might be seen the numerous visitors to the show, walking and conversing with one another, or sitting in groups, whilst the gentlemen of the party supplied them with refreshments from the luncheon tent.

As Beatrice and Emmeline sauntered amidst the crowd, nodding on the right hand and the left, and mentioning the names of the people to me, I thought that no one had ever been blessed with such a number of cousins before; and that my father's family appeared to have no end. There were the William Estcourts,

who lived in London, and took upon themselves to be pert in consequence, and to make patronizing remarks upon the fashion of my sisters' dresses; and there were the Abel Estcourts, whose father had been converted by, and married to, the relict of a South African missionary, who had been boiled down for the stock-pot in the course of his labours, which melancholy end could not be forgotten by his widow even in a second state of wedded happiness; in consequence of which she dressed the young Abel Estcourts in poke bonnets and duffle cloaks, and forbade them to smile or speak like ordinary mortals. On which account they credited themselves with such superior sanctity to the rest of the family, that our branch was altogether too bad for them to attempt association with; and after one of them had given me a tract, which I stuck in a profane manner in the band of my cap (until Emmeline took it from me), they passed on, and molested us no further.

Then we met the Joshua Estcourts, who came from the remotest recesses of the earth, somewhere about twenty miles from a market town, and yet gave themselves all the airs of London belles, and were so extremely ladylike, that they could not pick a strawberry, or a rose, without putting kid gloves on; and were reported to dress themselves, for making a tour of inspection of their father's pigsties, in the same fashion that they would have done for a stroll in Hyde Park.

My aunt, Mrs. Logan, was the mother of only three sons, the two elder of whom, bearing a strong resemblance to her youngest darling, were lounging about on the lawn, grinning and whispering in an awkward manner to one another, and meeting the kindly advances of my sisters with the confusion of schoolboys,

followed by an explosion of rude laughter as soon as their backs were turned, for which I thirsted to knock them down. Here, also, was my poor old grandfather being wheeled about in an invalid chair; but as he had quite lost his memory, and almost his senses, it was useless for Emmeline to try and make him understand who I was. He only nodded his feeble head, and said, "Yes, my dear; yes, my dear: just so," to whatever she advanced, and so remained till the date of his death, which happened about four years afterwards; a non-entity in the household; something which had to be fed and clothed, and looked after, but of whom, those duties being fulfilled, no one took any further notice.

I remarked that all the Estcourts seemed more at home with each other than they were with my sisters, and that they were quick to catch up any word they said, and either cavil at or contradict it. I observed, also, that whilst Beatrice, hanging in all her pride upon the arm of her young husband, seemed to take the keenest pleasure in following up their unprovoked attacks, until she had fairly driven them into a corner, Emmeline attempted, by her gentle answers and explanations, to conciliate them towards herself. Yet I must say, however much I admired the latter course of action, that my sympathies were more in unison with those of my eldest sister. Indeed, Beatrice and I were the most alike of all our family, in disposition as well as in appearance; but being masculine, in love of mischief I perhaps outstripped her.

Presently the library party issued from the house, and I saw Mrs. Estcourt, in her grey satin dress, moving about the lawn, attended by at least half a dozen

of her granddaughters, all eager to carry her shawl, or her parasol, or to offer an arm for her acceptance.

"How they all *toady* her!" exclaimed Beatrice, with an air of the greatest contempt, as she watched their proceedings.

"But, my darling, she is their grandmother," said her husband, who did not always acquiesce in his young wife's opinions, "and it is quite right that they should pay her a little attention."

"Oh, I should be the last person to find fault with that, Harry, if it were only genuine; but you should hear those very girls abuse her behind her back. They hate 'doing duty' quite as much as Emmy or I should do, but they profess to like it, for fear of being cut out of her will. That's at the bottom of it all."

"Hush, Beatrice," said Emmeline, cautiously, "Uncle Jabez is close behind us."

"Is he?" exclaimed my incorrigible sister aloud, as she turned her head to ascertain the truth; "oh! so he is — well, I don't care if he heard me say so."

And he evidently had heard her, for the next minute he passed us with a grunt, and was soon deep in earnest conversation with his sister, Mrs. Logan, whose eyes, directed to the spot where we stood, betrayed the subject which they were discussing.

It was not long before my father extricated himself from the circle which surrounded his mother and joined ours instead; but he made no remark upon the incident which had caused our temporary separation, and only proposed an immediate adjournment to the luncheon-tent. Conducting us thither, he made himself

completely at home, without any reference to the outraged feelings of his maiden sisters, Sarah and Susan, who had installed themselves within its precincts, and would have wished the table to remain as unmolested as they were likely to be themselves.

CHAPTER V.

But when luncheon was over, and my father had left us again, Beatrice wandered into the shrubberies with her husband, and Emmeline was taken possession of by Captain Talbot, who was the best-looking man on the ground, and I, grown weary of watching the company stroll up and down the paths in an aimless manner, strolled away myself through a splendid flower-parterre, into an ornamental farmyard, which I quickly vacated again, having lamed a large Muscovy drake, that flew at my legs. The farmyard led, by a circuitous route, through an adjacent paddock, to an artificial lake, the banks of which were planted with flowering shrubs, and were not far distant from the palings which enclosed the park. On the lake was floating a small boat, which I had seen and been tempted by from a distance; but when I reached the edge of the water, I found that my design of having a row had been anticipated, and that two lads were already busily engaged in endeavouring to unloose the boat from her moorings.

These were my cousins, Joshua Estcourt, a son of my uncle William, and Thomas Logan, whose face was still bound up in the pocket-handkerchief; and as I came suddenly upon them from behind the bushes which clothed the sides of the lakelet they scowled at me, and said nothing. But they were boys, and however unprepossessing in manner or appearance, I was

drawn towards them on that account; and I desired to make one of the boat's crew.

"Halloa! cousins," I commenced, trying to speak in a friendly voice, notwithstanding the want of cordiality displayed in their countenances "are you bound for a row? I'll go with you."

The boy Thomas Logan looked me in the face in a sulky manner as I addressed them, and then, without speaking, he stooped, and, gathering up a large handful of mud and slime from the bank, threw it right upon my velvet suit, where it remained clinging in a filthy mass to my waistcoat and trousers; whilst the other lad, who was a foolish-looking, pudding-faced fellow, put his hand up before his mouth, and giggled like a girl. I felt as if all the blood in my body rushed to my face.

"What did you do that for?" I exclaimed, hotly.

"Find out," replied Thomas Logan, with an insensate leer, as he proceeded with the unmooring of the boat.

"I *will* find out," I said, advancing towards him; "and I will give you something to remember me by, into the bargain."

They were both bigger and older than myself; but at my words they leapt simultaneously into the pleasure-boat, which was by this time free, and pushing a little way from shore, where they thought they should be safe, sat and grinned at me in a way very difficult for a hot spirit like mine to bear with patience.

"You're a pair of cowards!" I exclaimed from the bank above them. "You're a couple of snobs! if you were gentlemen, you would be glad to fight when a gentleman asks you to do so."

"We are quite as much gentlemen as you are, so come," sneered Thomas Logan in his fancied security, "though you do think so much of your fine black velvet *frock*. Aren't we a lady, Josh?"

The sarcasm was too much. My father's words were ringing in my ears, and I forgot my sister Emmeline's caution, and everything but the insult offered me.

"You are not gentlemen," I shouted; "your fathers are only shopkeepers in the City, and I wouldn't dirty my hands by fighting you."

I saw Thomas Logan change colour at my address; and Joshua Estcourt took up as much water as his hand would hold and threw it at me. After a pause, the other said, as if driven to use his last missile —

"Your mother ran away!"

"It's a lie!" I exclaimed, and with a sudden run I leapt off the bank and into the boat itself. Her occupants were quite unprepared for the assault; and as they rose in confusion to receive me, the little craft rocked backwards and forwards with the unequal balance. But I thought of nothing but pummelling the head of Thomas Logan. Dashing forward, I brought my inexperienced blows to bear as well as I could upon the eyes and nose of my adversary, perfectly heedless of either the danger in which I placed the boat, or the screams for help of Joshua Estcourt, which, the lake being on a level with the lawn, soon brought the gentlemen leaping over the fence which divided us from them; and the ladies clustering together outside it, eager to know what was the matter. It was lucky as it happened that they did so, for in another minute our struggles had made the little boat

heel over, and we were all three floundering in the water together. The accident was unattended with danger, as, although we could not swim, help was at hand as soon as needed, and my cheek was still flushed with excitement as my father landed me on the side of the lake. I was wet through, of course; but as I shook the water from my hair, and the hair from my eyes, and saw the figure of Thomas Logan in the arms of Captain Talbot, I freed myself from my father's grasp, and darted forward to attack him again. But a strong hand pinioned me from behind.

"Gently, Gerald," said the now familiar voice, "you've had enough of fighting for to-day; what is all this about?"

Then I looked up, and saw that we were surrounded by a number of gentlemen, amongst whom were my uncles Jabez and William, and Mr. Logan, the father of my foe.

"All about!" I repeated proudly, "why, he insulted me, father; and I'll teach him what it is to insult the 'head of the family.'"

"The head of *what?*" exclaimed my uncle Jabez, fixing the eye of a hawk upon me. "What is the boy talking about, Sampson?"

"The head of the family," I repeated boldly, looking him straight in the face; "for that's what I shall be, when we are all grown up."

I fancied I saw a smile lurking about the corners of my father's mouth as I spoke, but he forced it down, and said to me gravely, "Whatever you may be in course of time, Gerald, you are only a boy now, and you have no business to fight your cousins, or call them abusive names: I am very angry with you."

"I'll fight him again," I said, determinately, "as soon as ever I have an opportunity."

"Pray, what does your son mean by this obstinacy, Mr. Estcourt?" said my uncle Logan, appealing to my father.

"I mean that your son is no gentleman, sir," I said defiantly, "and that I told him so, and that he is a coward, and I told him that also."

"And you said that Joshua's father and mine were shopkeepers," here put in Thomas Logan from behind the shelter of Captain Talbot's person.

"Gerald, is that true?" asked my father sternly.

"Yes, it is, father," I replied; "you know you said yourself, as we were coming here, that they had all made their money by trade, except you."

My father was completely taken aback.

"That's the way, Sampson, is it, that you bring up your children to think of your family?" said my uncle Jabez, angrily.

"But I shouldn't have said so, father," I interposed eagerly, desirous only to clear his character in his brother's eyes, "if they hadn't thrown mud at me, and called me a 'lady,' and behaved like shopkeepers' boys; and I shouldn't have fought them even for that, only they said my mother ran away, and she didn't, father, did she?" I concluded, looking up into his face.

All my dread of mentioning the forbidden name had vanished in my desire to exculpate myself and him. My father's countenance darkened with anger.

"No! my boy, she didn't," he replied with an oath; "and if Thomas Logan, or any one else, dares to say so again, I'll thrash him within an inch of his life.

Come on, Gerald; I'm very glad you fought him, and I wish you had licked him well."

And, linking my arm within his own, my father walked sternly away from the little group, leaving his brothers, doubtless, in anything but an enviable state of mind at the scrape which their sons had led them into, with the most powerful member of the family. Of course, as soon as we had reached the lawn, the whole story, with the exception of the part which entailed the mention of my mother's name, was repeated for the benefit of my grandmother and her guests, and many were the unflattering comments which were passed on the share I had taken in the business. Mrs. Estcourt and her daughters were indignant because my father steadfastly took my part throughout the recital, and dwelt with malicious enjoyment upon the fact of my having called myself the "head of the family" in the face of my uncle Jabez. My aunt, Mrs. Logan, bristled with rage as she heard the treatment her poor suffering boy had undergone at my hands, and her longing to give me a good box on the ears was depicted on every line of her countenance; however, she was compelled to content herself with casting withering looks at me, as she hastened to see the extent of injury his aching tooth had sustained from the sudden trial of the "cold-water cure" to which it had been subjected; and my sisters gathered round me, regardless of the dripping condition of my attire, and covering me with kisses, expressed their intention of returning home with me at once.

"He must not remain in his wet suit, papa," said Emmeline anxiously; "pray let us go as soon as the carriage can be got ready."

"There is no need for you to accompany him, Emmy," he replied; "I have had enough of gaiety for to-day, and Gerald can return with me."

But both my sisters insisted upon bearing my father and myself company to Grasslands; and their guests appeared as ready to take their departure as themselves.

"Very eager to go," remarked my grandmother, who was not overpleased to see such a fuss made about my insignificant self, or her flower-show thinned so early of some of its brightest ornaments.

"Of course, grandmamma," laughed Beatrice, mischievously; "it is quite right we should be anxious about the health of such an important personage as Gerald; eldest son of the eldest son remember; it is not as if he came of a younger branch."

My grandmother made no answer to this speech, and the surrounding cousins looked away, and pretended not to have heard it. I was hurried from Wiversdale with scarcely so much as a farewell from my new relations; and I dare say that the remarks passed upon me as soon as my back was turned were not such as I should have cared to hear. I was placed inside the barouche with my sisters this time, for warmth's sake, and did not see my father again, until, having changed my wet garments and made myself comfortable, I descended to the library at home. He was the sole occupant, and was evidently thinking deeply, but as I entered the room he raised his head and viewed me kindly.

"Well, Gerald, are you dry again, eh? — that's right; but next time you fight, I advise you to do so upon *terra firma*. I am not sorry as it has happened;

it will teach your cousins to keep civil tongues in their heads towards you, for the future; but it has been an unfortunate introduction to the notice of your grandmother. I'm afraid you'll have to content yourself with what shillings I can leave you, my boy; you'll never take poor Lascelles' place at Wiversdale now."

Then I knew that my father had wished my grandmother and my uncle Jabez to take a fancy to me, and make me heir of Wiversdale, which would naturally devolve on the eldest grandson, if he acquitted himself with satisfaction in the eyes of those who had the power to leave it him. Yet, child as I was, I felt thankful that it was not likely that I should ever be placed under such an obligation to the people who had made my mother's married life unhappy. I had thought very little of the *reason* for which the quarrels between herself and my father took place. It had never entered my youthful imagination to sit down and seriously consider whose fault it had been that this great shadow had been permitted to darken the lives of my sisters and myself. It had never struck me then (as it did in after years) that however much the enmity of my grandmother and aunts and uncles towards my mother may have irritated and annoyed her, if she had maintained a loving and amiable course of conduct towards her husband, his mother's influence would probably have had no power to come between them as it did. I only saw the effects of the separation in the misery it had entailed upon herself; and naturally, I was on my mother's side, and opposed to all (except my father) who were opposed to her; and his estrangement from her, I attributed solely to the same agency which had wrecked her happiness before she left him. The affec-

tion and duty which I knew that I owed to both parents, but which my loyalty to each seemed to preclude my showing to the other, was a puzzle which I was as yet too young to solve, and which perplexed me so much that I always put the thought of it away from my mind whenever it arose to trouble me; but the malice of Mrs. Estcourt towards my mother (from whatever cause it may have arisen) was quite easy for me to understand, and in proportion to the resentment which the subject invariably kindled in my breast, was the hidden satisfaction which I now felt at the idea that I should never be called upon to acknowledge myself a debtor to those who had been enemies of hers. My father had said that he wished me to rise by my abilities, as he had done by his; and thinking over his conversation, I resolved that, some day, I would set myself as far above Thomas Logan and Joshua Estcourt, and the rest of the rising generation, as he had done above the last.

These were not good thoughts for a child's heart to harbour; but those who sow the seed must answer for the harvest; and from my earliest years, circumstances may be said to have separated me from my relations and marked me out to run the race which was before me, alone. But however lightly my father may have seen fit (owing to the counter-irritation produced on him at the time by my cousin's insolence) to pass over my *escapade* at Wiversdale, the occurrence had greatly vexed him; and I perceived, to my chagrin, that the remembrance of it did not quit his mind for many days afterwards. More than once during that period, when we were alone, he purposely drew our conversation into the channel which occupied his

thoughts, and endeavoured by stories, which bore favourably upon the characters of the various members of his family to disabuse my mind of the impression which, as he imagined, it had received from the words which he had spoken to me on the box-seat of the drag. But my dislike to everybody and everything at Wiversdale, had far deeper root than my father thought. It had been sown in my infancy and nurtured with my growth, and no mere argument could have the power to root it out. Several times during the remainder of my stay at Grasslands did I accompany him and my sisters to my grandfather's house; but Mrs. Estcourt's behaviour towards me never increased in cordiality: on the contrary, she seemed to dislike me more each time she saw me. From what I have heard, I fancy that my brother Lascelles was a very different character from myself; he appears to have been of a timid, retiring nature, easily cowed (probably on account of his delicate health), and used to give in to his grandmother's will in everything. With such a disposition she must, with her love of tyranny and despotism, have been in her glory; and consequently the bold fearlessness of mine (so like both my father's and mother's), struck her as a most unpleasant contrast.

I was too little afraid of her, and of Wiversdale; too apt to blurt out my worthless opinions; altogether too independent. So Mrs. Estcourt dubbed me before she had seen me a second time, and from the first hour of our meeting, one was as indifferent as the other. I do not believe she looked upon me as the brother of Lascelles, nor even as my father's son. To her I was the child of Lady Mary, who had been reared beneath my mother's supervision, endowed with all her affection,

and doubtless taught to return it as a son should do, and that circumstance alone would have been sufficient to estrange me from the heart of Mrs. Estcourt.

I believe she had favoured Lascelles simply because retaining possession of him asserted the supremacy of her will over that of her son's wife; and that if there had been any division in the matter, any question of the boy sharing his time and his duty between her and Lady Mary, that her interest in him would have taken flight, and she would have resigned the charge altogether.

But the endeavours of my father, since Lascelles was dead, to instal me in the vacant place fell utterly to the ground. I could never, at the age I was then, have been given over entirely to my grandmother as he had been, and therefore she regarded me as the exclusive property of her daughter-in-law, and disliked me accordingly. We had more than one quarrel (such a quarrel as can take place between a young boy and an old woman) during my stay at Grasslands, and as she never took any pains to hide her indifference, neither did I to conceal the dislike with which her conduct inspired me.

Her behaviour to my father was a puzzle. I could not determine whether she did or did not love him. She was *brusque* and rough in her manner of speaking to everybody, and he was almost as much so as herself. She generally received any communication he made relative to his plans or actions with an objection, often followed by a quarrel between them; but I observed that although my father never gave in to her on a single point, or even made a concession in her favour, the effects of their disagreements appeared to vanish

as if by magic, leaving them both the same as before, which is not the usual case with people who have been squabbling.

I attribute the cause of this to the fact that Mrs. Estcourt (notwithstanding that her high temper made them occasionally differ) was very proud of her son, and anxious, for politic reasons, to keep friends with him; although in that case being obliged (on account of his obstinacy) to defer to his opinions, her spirit inwardly chafed at the humiliation, and caused her to be outwardly cold towards him.

It can scarcely be imagined that I was sufficiently precocious to arrive at these shrewd conclusions at the tender age of eleven; but remembering what I thought then, and comparing it with my observations of later years, has enabled me to draw the inference, which I now present, in order to bring my readers to a better understanding with the characters of some of the principal personages of my story.

CHAPTER VI.

I HAD been two months at Grasslands: it was the middle of July when I arrived there, and Michaelmas was now near at hand. I had spent the time as happily as it was possible for a boy to do, passing the days either with my father's friends or the stable-men, and the evenings with my sisters in the more refined circle of the drawing-room. The contrast between my associates was striking, and it is to be hoped that the evening influence had sometimes the power to dispel much of that of the morning, for in general the latter was not the best to which I might have been subjected. One day, about the close of the second month, my father addressed me abruptly.

"Gerald, would you like to go to school?"

"To a boys' school, father? — yes."

I had confided to him, during some of our conversations, the dreary solitude which I endured whilst studying with my old tutor at Guildford, and he had fully sympathized with me. Now, the idea of daily and hourly mixing with a large number of companions struck me with a keen sense of enjoyment, and I followed my assent with a string of eager inquiries —

"Am I really going to school, father, and when?"

He nodded, amused at my evident excitement. "Really and truly: I have decided to send you to Eton this term."

"To Eton! that's down by Windsor, isn't it?"

Then a melancholy vision of my mother, and what she would say to the proposed plan, rose up before me to check my enthusiasm, and my countenance changed so rapidly that my father observed it.

"How now, Gerald, what's the matter?"

"When shall I start, father?"

"I want to send you at once, that is, in a fortnight from this time."

"Shan't I go home first?" I demanded rather timidly, for since Emmeline had spoken on the subject to me I had been shy (except on that one memorable occasion) of alluding to my mother before him.

"You will go to Guildford for a week first," he replied, with a stress upon the name of the place, as if he would tell me that in future my *home* would be with himself.

"And how soon, father?"

"Next Thursday, my boy. My tailor has orders to take your measure as you pass through London, and he will send your outfit after you to Guildford. All other arrangements will, of course, be made for you."

I was sorry to leave Grasslands; but I was anxious to see my mother again, and to tell her, by word of mouth, of the wondrous life I had been living since we parted; and I was elated at the prospect of going to a public school, and no longer being limited to girls for my playfellows. The party at Grasslands, too, was about to break up. The Claremonts were bound north, for the purposes of shooting; my father and Emmeline intended wintering in Paris, and their guests were commencing to disperse in various directions. Therefore, it was not altogether with a heavy heart that I took

my departure for the place which I still considered my home — a servant accompanying me, as before, part of the way, and seeing me safely deposited in the train for Guildford, an attention which I resented as an indignity to my lately acquired experience.

It was evening when I arrived at Guildford. The days were beginning to close in early and feel chilly, and the lamps were already lighted at the station. The first thing I caught sight of as the train stopped, was the face of my mother beneath the gas, peering anxiously forward to ascertain if I was amongst the passengers. I leapt out of the carriage, and in another minute was in her arms.

"My dear Gerald!" she exclaimed, "my own boy; how late you are; I expected you by the five o'clock train, and we have been waiting here for more than an hour."

Then I turned and saw that Gertrude was with her. How dowdy they both looked to me, in their close bonnets and dark cloaks, after the fashionable ladies I had been used to mix with at Grasslands!

"Why did you wait, mother?" I said in answer, "I should have come on all right. I was obliged to stop in town to let Stultz take my measure, and the brute kept me at his place for nearly an hour. Halloa! that's mine!" I exclaimed to a passing porter, who was conveying my portmanteau out of sight.

"Very good, sir. Fly, sir?"

"Fly! — of course, and put the luggage on; there's a hamper in the van. Come along, mother."

"Couldn't we walk, dear?" interposed my mother, "it's not far, you know, and the things might go on a truck."

"Oh, very well! I don't care which it is," I said carelessly, issuing a fresh order to the porter, "we'll walk if you like; but it's getting rather cold, isn't it?"

I linked my arm in my mother's in the old familiar fashion as I spoke, and she pressed it closely to her side; but as we left the station, I heard her sigh, although she turned it off with a laughing invitation to Gertrude to observe what a man I had grown since they had seen me last.

Her house was one of a terrace, easy of access from the railway station, and we soon reached it, and found my younger sisters waiting to give me a hearty welcome home again. My portmanteau and hamper arrived almost as soon as I did, and were placed in my old room; and of course I was eager to unpack them at once, and display the presents I had received whilst absent, and those which I had been entrusted to bring for my sisters. But as I was rushing up the stairs, my mother spoke to me from the hall —

"Not now, my dear boy," she urged, "there is no time: wait till afterwards."

"It won't take me a minute, mother," I replied, "and I must wash my hands before dinner."

"Dinner, child! *tea*, you mean: we had dinner, as usual, at half-past one."

I stood still on the staircase for a second, as though to recollect myself, and then I said —

"Oh, yes — to be sure — I forgot: well, I'll be down to tea, mother, before it is on the table."

But hungry as I was after my long journey, I could not attack that meal with the same relish that I had been used to do, for since living at Grasslands I had been accustomed to have my dinner at that hour,

and I missed it. My mother quickly perceived and taxed me with my want of appetite; but I denied the fact, and made fresh assaults on the bread and butter and marmalade, attributing my lack of hunger to the luncheon I had had whilst passing through London.

"But why don't you dine late, mother, as we do at Grasslands?" I asked, in continuation of the subject, and quite overlooking the plural pronoun which I had inadvertently used.

"Because it is not so convenient, Gerald, in a small household," she answered, in a tone of offence, "neither is it so desirable for children as dining early."

Her manner silenced me, and I felt conscious of the mistake I had made, which her coolness for the remainder of the meal did not render easy of forgetfulness; and even after tea was cleared away it was little better. All my efforts to draw her into familiar conversation proved vain; and when my sisters clustered round me, and I commenced to talk with them of all I had been seeing and doing during our separation, my mother took up a book, and installed herself with a reading-lamp at the furthest end of the room, where she appeared to be not only perfectly devoid of interest in anything I said, but scarcely conscious that I spoke at all. Emboldened by this proceeding, I was describing with great animation the beauties of Grasslands, and the pleasures I had experienced there (interrupted every now and then by an exclamation of surprise, or a wish that they had been present from Lily or Marguerite), when I saw my mother rise hastily from her seat and leave the room, and as she passed the corner where we were assembled, I caught a glimpse of her

tearful eyes. Gertrude saw them also, and begged me at once to drop the subject.

"It cannot be a pleasant one for poor mamma," she said (and as she spoke the conversation I had held with Emmeline at Grasslands returned vividly to my mind); "do try to talk of something else, Gerald, whilst you are at Guildford. It will not be for many days, remember."

It was easy to tell a young boy, whose heart was full of the novel pleasures he had experienced and strange sights he had seen, to hold his tongue and keep his confidences to himself; but the result was, that I felt under so much constraint whilst I remained with my mother that I cannot have appeared to her as the same child who had left her care but two short months before, and she doubtless laid all the change to the influence to which I had been exposed at Grasslands. I did not wish to wound her; at the same time, gratitude to my father for the kindness he had shown me seemed to forbid that I should ignore the subject; I was troubled in my mind, therefore; I no longer felt open towards my mother as I had been in the days gone by, because I knew that my breast was full of feelings which were the last she would wish to know I cherished; and young as I was, what I felt during that first visit paid to the home in which I had been reared none can understand except those who, like myself, have been tossed backward and forward, like a shuttlecock between two battledores, from one influence to another.

It was not the inferiority of the rooms or furniture in the house at Guildford, compared to what I had been lately accustomed to, that affected me (although they certainly looked very small and dingy after the

magnificent apartments at Grasslands), for children do not care for outward appearances; but I missed the excitement of my father's house; I missed the noise and the laughter, the singing and the talking, after which the silence of death seemed to reign over the well-ordered little establishment of my mother.

She was disappointed, also, and vexed with me; she imagined that I regretted the lentils and pottage of Egypt more than I did, and that I cared nothing for returning to my quiet home. She had always been of a petulant and uncertain disposition; now she was positively cross, and rebuked me sharply upon very small occasions. Everything was a grievance. Of course she had been apprised of the plan for my going to Eton before I returned to her; but the facts of my outfit having been ordered to be supplied by my father's tailors in London, of my hair having been cut very short during my absence, and, worst of all, of my wearing kid gloves and sporting a little dandy cane which my father had given me (good-naturedly thinking that it would please my boyish fancy), were all visited by my mother upon my head. She disliked to see the pleasure I took in such things; and any possession I had acquired during my two months' absence, or accomplishment I had learned, or fresh habit or expression I had taken up, was looked upon as a special slight to herself and resented upon me.

One day she came upon me suddenly as I was sitting in a corner of my sisters' schoolroom, poring over a copy of my father's old novel, "Gerald Trevor," and which he had given me, because, as he said, the hero was my godfather. It was a stirring tale, which had been very fashionable at the time of its publication,

a story of "fast life" undoubtedly, but containing nothing that could injure the mind of a lad of the age I had then attained; and I was deeply interested in it, so much so, that I did not hear my mother's approach until she was close by my side.

"What are you reading, Gerald?" she demanded. Her voice had already put on an offended tone, for she had guessed my study from the binding of the volume, and I dare say that I coloured as I replied —

"Only 'Gerald Trevor,' mother."

"Only 'Gerald Trevor!'" she exclaimed, with a sudden impulse of passion; "have I not forbidden you, again and again, to read any book without first asking my permission? How dare you?" and seizing the volume from my hand, she flung it to the other end of the room. "Don't let me see you reading that, Gerald, or any other such trash, whilst you remain in my house. They may try to contaminate your mind at Grasslands, and to alienate your heart from me and your sisters, if they choose, but for the short time you are under my care I shall do my duty by you." And white with emotion she left the room; whilst I picked up my injured book, and said between my teeth, as I attempted to smooth its creased pages —

"By Jove! I shall be jolly glad when this is all over."

This was not the way to retain a boy's affection. My mother's jealousy was so great that it permitted her altogether to lose sight of my happiness during the short time I stayed at Guildford; and such behaviour on her part was least calculated to win me back to herself, or to make the glories of Grasslands, where I had had both love and liberty, fade in the distance. Consequently I was delighted when the moment arrived

for me to go to Eton, and as the arrangement had been that I should only stay ten days at Guildford, I had not long to wait. I left my mother and sisters with too much happiness, I am afraid, thoughtlessly depicted on my face; a well-lined purse and luxuries in general quite sufficient to insure me a welcome in the little world for which I was bound.

This time I was considered competent to travel by myself; and, glad as I was to go, I remember how the tears momentarily dimmed my eyes as the train rushed panting away from the station, and I instinctively felt that, excepting as a visitor, I had seen the last of Guildford and my mother's home.

I have no intention of entering minutely into the chronicles of my school life, which extended over five years from the time I first entered upon it, for I have already lingered, longer perhaps than is advisable, over the details of my childhood. And yet those five years contained more of pure and unalloyed happiness for me than it can ever be my lot to feel again. Fortune followed me to Eton; and the usual sense of loneliness, which every boy must feel upon leaving home for a public school, did not exist for me after the first twelve hours. At the end of that time, as I was sitting by myself on a low wall in the playground, thinking rather despondently, as boy after boy rushed past without taking any notice of me, that school wasn't half so "jolly" as I had anticipated, I heard a clatter of feet which came my way, and next a genial voice, though rather out of breath, exclaiming —

"Halloa, Estcourt! why haven't you looked us up? We didn't hear of your arrival till after class this morning."

I raised my eyes, and saw before me a lad of about fifteen years of age; tall and fair, with an open, expressive countenance and a look of the greatest good-humour. Beside him stood a younger boy of perhaps twelve, who bore too strong a resemblance to him to leave any doubt of the relationship which existed between them. Totally ignorant of who they were, I yet descended from my perch with alacrity, only too pleased with the prospect of companionship, before with inquiring eyes I put the question —

"But I say — what are your names?"

The younger boy burst into a fit of laughter and exclaimed, "That's a good 'un;" whilst the eldest, who appeared to me to be quite a man, looked amused as he replied —

"Why, we're your first cousins, Estcourt. Haven't you heard of the Lascelles?"

Of course I had; but no one had thought it worth his while to tell me I should meet them here.

"I'm Jack," interposed the younger brother, "and he's George; never mind though; come on and I'll show you no end of larks."

"Wait a minute, Jack," said George Lascelles, "I want to speak to Estcourt first. Fancy your not knowing that this was our cramming-house! Why, father told us you were coming here as far back as the middle of last vacation, and I thought my uncle only sent you to be near us — it's all one though. What I wanted to tell you is, that I've managed to get you for my fag, and you may consider yourself a precious lucky young fellow to be so."

"Oh, is he lucky?" exclaimed the Honourable Jack Lascelles (for these boys were the two younger sons of

the Earl of Portsdowne). "I wouldn't be you for something, Estcourt. I fag for Grimshaw and he's bad enough, but Lascelles major is about the biggest bully in Eton."

Lascelles major gave a good-natured smile.

"Don't you believe him, Estcourt, and don't let him lead you into mischief — otherwise, perhaps, he is as good a guide as you could have to the ins and outs of the place. And now, Jack, don't forget what I've been telling you:" and with a look of warning which the Honourable Jack resented by sticking his tongue in his cheek as soon as his brother's back was turned, George Lascelles walked away and left us to ourselves.

This was my first introduction to the cousins with whom I was ever afterwards on terms of the greatest intimacy, and it proved of infinite service to me. Eton, like all other places where there is an assemblage of classes, has its tuft-hunters, and the fact of my being nephew to Lord Portsdowne and first cousin to the Lascelles, who were popular in the school, brought me under the notice of several of the most influential boys there, and saved me doubtless from many a back-ache and heart-ache.

From the beginning, George Lascelles stood my protector and my friend, and I looked up to him with that species of admiring affection with which boys and girls are apt to regard those of their own sex a little older and more experienced than themselves; whilst Jack was my inseparable companion, the sharer in all my exploits, either of fun or danger, as well as in the punishments which invariably followed our detection; and when George left school about a year after I had

entered it, my youngest cousin and myself were known as the two wildest, most daring, and most incorrigible boys in Eton.

I throve and flourished there, both in mind and body. For the first time in my life I found outlet for the effervescent spirits with which Nature had endowed me, and which, having fair play, left my mind at liberty to fix itself during the hours of study, upon whatever subject I had in hand, undisturbed by the vain longings for, I scarcely knew what, which had been used to come between me and my education at home.

I spent my summer vacations at Grasslands, and my Christmas holidays at Guildford; it had been so arranged before I entered on my new life. But every year seemed to widen the difference of feeling with which I welcomed those two intervals of study. At Grasslands all was gaiety and sunshine; my father generally invited one or both of the Lascelles to spend the summer with me, whilst I never returned to his house but he had devised some new pleasure for my pursuance. Under his instruction I learned to ride on horseback, to drive four-in-hand, to shoot, to swim, to fence, to box, to exercise myself, in fact, in all the athletic sports in which a true boy delights.

At Guildford, on the contrary, each vacation seemed to increase the dullness and the gloom. They were but repetitions of the visit I paid there on the occasion of my first return from Grasslands, excepting that my mother's continued petulance of temper towards myself made me at last begin to think that she almost disliked me. I was no longer her "own Gerald," and her "dearest boy," and such sarcastic answers to my requests as, "Oh, of course, if your *father* permits you

to do so!" or, "I do not suppose you would be likely to concede to any wish of *mine*," used often to rouse all my worst feelings against her, and make me inwardly vow that I would never ask her permission for anything again. Added to which, my mother still insisted upon keeping me to very strict rules whilst living with her; so strict, indeed, that as my years advanced they were not only absurd but humiliating. She might have made my Christmas holidays as cheerful to me as were my summer ones, for I still retained a great affection for her; but she could not conquer the jealousy she felt at the knowledge that her home was no longer mine, and that I had other interests besides those which centred in the little town of Guildford. Her greatest wish was, I believe, to bind my heart firmly to herself, in spite of all counteracting influences to which I might be exposed; and with a little tact she might have found the task an easy one, instead of which, from her want of self-control, she was destroying, inch by inch, the love which I retained for her. I remained at Eton until my sixteenth birthday was close at hand. Before that time arrived I had consulted with my father, and made up my mind as to what I intended to do. My cousin Jack had left school a year previously and been entered as a cadet at Woolwich, and I must needs go to Woolwich too to study with him. To this my father made no objection; he wished me to have a profession and to follow my own inclination in the matter, and if I had a preference for the Artillery, into the Artillery I should go. He knew that if ever I chose to quit the army, I should not be thrown on my own resources, and in this, as in all else, he let me have my own way. For my part, I had taken no trouble to weigh

the relative advantages of serving her Majesty on horseback or on foot. I had, indeed, no preference, but I fancied that I could not be happy without my *fidus Achates*, and was only eager to follow his footsteps. I believe we shared the idea at that period of finding our happiness for life in mutual friendship, a sentiment very soon knocked out of us by a few months' mixing in the world, leaving us both well content to be only the good companions we have since remained. Fancy me then, at sixteen, emancipated from school discipline and eager to begin life; my stock-in-trade, a little useful knowledge, a large amount of ignorance, a very good opinion of myself, and a neat taste in dress.

CHAPTER VII.

FIVE years had not passed away without bringing many changes to my family. My sister Beatrice had a nursery full of children, although she looked as young and as blooming as ever; and her husband had fallen into the error of taking too much port and too little exercise, and was growing burly before his time, in consequence. Emmeline had married my old friend Captain Talbot, rather against her father's wishes, and gone to Canada with him; and Gertrude (who was the prettiest of all my sisters) had accepted the hand of her cousin Lord Lyndon (Lord Portsdowne's eldest son), a marriage which seemed to cement still closer my friendship with the brothers. My mother had permitted my fourth sister Lilias to engage herself to a curate at Guildford, a circumstance which had so enraged my father that he never sent for the girl to Grasslands at all; and poor Marguerite had developed a spinal affection which threatened to keep her on the sofa for the rest of her life. So that Lady Mary had the prospect of keeping her two youngest daughters with her altogether; and my father was, for the time being, alone. Another circumstance which had happened was the death of my grandfather, by which each of his children had received an accession to their fortune. My grandmother bore her widowhood with great serenity. The death of her husband made no palpable diminution in her yearly expenditure, for they had not lived up to

their income during his lifetime: nor did it make any palpable difference to the household itself, for the old man had been a nonentity for some time past. She was surrounded perhaps by more harpies than before; by old ladies, both widowed and single, who cherished faint hopes of eventually obtaining a small slice out of the large fortune she would still have to distribute at her own death; and grandchildren, sent to Wiversdale by their parents, with full instructions what to do and what to avoid, in order to please their grandmother; but beyond this, that the place swarmed with fetchers and carriers, I could not see that it was altered. I often went over to the manor during my summer vacations, not from inclination, but because my father wished me to do so. For some time before I left Eton for Woolwich, Mrs. Estcourt and I had come to a full understanding of the terms upon which we were likely to remain with each other. One day, when I was about fifteen, she rebuked me sharply for my behaviour towards a certain old maid, one of the harpies alluded to, and I answered, in self-defence, that I could not like her because she was such a "toady."

"What do you mean by a toady?" snapped my grandmother.

"Well! I mean that she toadies *you*," I replied (I was holding a skein of worsted for her at the time, and could not fail to meet her eyes) — "she always runs messages for you whether she is tired or not; and unpicks your work when you've done it wrong; and agrees in everything you say although it may be just opposite to her own opinion."

"In fact," said my grandmother, "Miss Rose is obliging and amiable (which I cannot say for all

people), and therefore entitled to the disrespect of a young lad like yourself."

"But she's not amiable," I replied; "she only does it for what she can get; if you didn't ask her to dinner almost every day she'd soon leave off running messages."

This was a home-thrust, and my grandmother took it as such, or perhaps the truth had not been so rudely presented to her before; anyway she was silent for a few minutes, and then she continued —

"At all events, Master Gerald, *you* do not take such pains to please me that you run any risk of being accused of being a 'toady.'"

"I should think not," I answered, bluntly; "they only do it in hopes you will leave them something when you die; and I don't want your money, and what's more, my father said I shouldn't touch it."

"Like your father's usual rudeness," said my grandmother, angrily twitching the worsted on my hands. "Neither you nor your sisters have ever behaved like my other grandchildren to me, and I need not have expected that you would. You have been brought up badly in the first instance, and your father encourages you in every act of impertinence or disobedience that you choose to perpetrate."

"I'm sure he does not," I said, firing up in my turn. "You have never cared for us, grandmamma, as you have for the others, and you never allude to my mother or sisters before me, but you have something unkind to say of them. I will not bear it, I will tell my father; I never could love you and I never shall," and dropping the skein of worsted in the most irreverent manner off my hands, I put them in my

pockets, and looked defiantly at her. Not, however, without an inward qualm, notwithstanding my fifteen years. The truth was out! What would she say to it? She took it, however, remarkably quietly.

"I know that, sir, and have known it all along, and who taught you to do so? But perhaps when you are old enough to form your own judgment you will find there are generally two sides to a story. In the meanwhile, I beg you will go back to Grasslands, as I can dispense with your company for the rest of to-day."

I did as she desired me, and it was not until my father dragged me over almost by main force, that my pride would permit me to revisit Wiversdale; but when I did so, I found to my surprise that things were altered rather for the better than the worse for me. Mrs. Estcourt's manner indeed was as unaffectionate as before; but she dropped a good deal of her sarcasm when alluding to my mother or sisters which had been the cause of many a battle between us. She could not resist turning down the corners of her mouth whenever any fresh evidence of my father's indulgence of me cropped up; or remarking every new article of dress which I put on; or observing that I was "very independent" each time I ventured to express an opinion in her presence; but yet she had more tolerance than heretofore. She seemed to place full reliance upon what I said, believing, I suppose, that a boy who could speak his mind so openly could not be capable of telling a falsehood. But still there was a great deal of ill-feeling between us, which appeared too strongly rooted for anything in this world to eradicate.

I left Eton in summer. I had spent the previous

vacation with my mother, and fully expected to go to Grasslands as usual for the coming one; but a few days before the school broke up, I received a curt letter from my father, directing me to go again to Guildford, and wait there until I had further directions from him. He dated from town, but gave me no reason for his wishes. His word was law, however; for with all his indulgence, he was a man of great determination, and I knew better than to trifle with him. Bidding a last farewell, therefore, to the old place where I had spent five happy years, I took my way into Surrey, and found my mother quite as surprised to see me as I had been to receive orders to go there.

I had no reason, however, to complain of the welcome I encountered; and after my first disappointment was over, I was glad that matters had been so arranged for me; for poor Marguerite, although suffering no pain, was entirely laid on her back, and fretting sadly over the enforced confinement to the house, so that my advent was hailed by her as a distraction from the monotony of her existence, especially as her sister had ceased to be much of a companion to her. Lilias (always the plainest of my mother's daughters) had become so self-important since her engagement to the curate — so far above the petty things of this world — that she considered making tippets and hoods, and other mysterious garments for the poor, out of a grey article which she termed "list," a far more important duty than striving to while away the weary hours for her sick sister; and, to my surprise, my mother upheld her in the idea. "Sitting under" the curate, too, whenever he read prayers, on Sundays or week-days; looking after his schools and his poor for him; and at-

tending all the prayer meetings, Dorcas meetings, and missionary meetings which took place in Guildford, came under the category of Lilias' new duties; and which, being novel, she performed with assiduity, leaving poor Marguerite to sigh away the sunny days upon the sofa, and to learn to think hardly of the Source whence her affliction came.

The curate himself was a fair-haired, round-faced young man, to whom I took the most unfraternal of aversions, which caused words between my mother and myself. This engagement was one after her own heart: she had strongly condemned the marriages of my elder sisters, as worldly and interested; and their conduct towards their *fiancés* as forward and unmaidenly, simply because her wishes had not been consulted in the matter. But Lilias' prospects were of her own making; and very indifferent prospects they seemed to me to be, for the curate had not sufficient money to marry on, and no chance of getting it. But then the courtship was carried on in so very delicate a style: the young people were never left alone for ten minutes together, and the conversation on the evenings when the bridegroom-expectant was invited to take a mild repast of tea and bread-and-butter with his beloved, generally turned on the prophecies and the end of the world — according to Dr. Cumming. Having been once, however, sufficiently irreverent to speak to the curate of one of these unintoxicating festivities, by the name of "ham, jam, and sacrifice," he reported me to Lady Mary, and I was excluded thenceforth from participation in them.

I made Lilias also highly indignant by speaking of her marriage as an event never likely to come off, and

asking her if the curate had ever presumed to kiss her, until she moved all her bundles of rags and "list" to an upper apartment; and left Marguerite and myself to the undisturbed enjoyment of the drawing-room, where we spent the days in reading "Childe Harold" and "The Bride of Abydos," *sub rosâ;* and where, pity to see my lively, romping sister condemned to one position, prevented my chafing, as I might have done, under my mother's continued attempts to make me forget that I had left off pinafores.

When I had been at Guildford about a week, a letter arrived for Lady Mary from my father, containing a solution of the reason for my being sent there. Since the death of my grandfather, he had set up an establishment in town, and it was his intention to make it his permanent residence.

"After Gerald has been entered at Woolwich," the letter went on to say, "it is my desire that his *home* is with myself; therefore he will, as a consequence, spend the vacations in London. His future visits to Guildford shall be regulated by his own wishes."

Choked with tears, half of which were for rage, my mother put this communication into my hands. I saw nothing in it to call forth such an excess of emotion. I liked the idea of having my home with my father, and since he was alone, thought it was just what it ought to be; and the way in which he wrote of my visits to my mother being regulated by my own wishes made me feel I was treated as the important personage I was. But my mother looked upon it as she would have regarded the sign-manual for my execution; and my inability to see the matter in so grave a light, only served to make her agitation greater.

"I knew how it would be," she exclaimed between her sobs, "when your father first took you from me, in that barbarous manner, and sent you to Eton. I foretold all this. I felt that he would alienate you from me, as he has done your sisters, until he raised up a complete barrier between us. Oh! these things will be visited: they will be visited!"

I exonerated my mother, in the first pages of this history, from having striven to set her children against their father; and during our infancy this record of her was true. But since Grasslands had shared me with Guildford, she had not always been so circumspect in her communications. She often was guilty now of innuendoes against her husband's character, which sounded ill from her lips, and occasionally she would indulge in a little outburst like the present. But I had learnt to love my father dearly, and I was not afraid to stand up for him while absent.

"I must have gone to school, mother, anyway," I replied; "and so we should have been separated whether my father had sent me to Eton or not. You could not have kept me at home all my life, like one of the girls."

"I know that," she said, "but I could have chosen a school for you myself, Gerald: a school somewhere near here where I could have watched over you, as only a mother can. Now you will be exposed to every evil example and temptation that a godless life can offer you, without any safeguard."

I winced at the idea of what I had escaped by being placed at a safe distance from her surveillance; but her tears distressed me, and so I strove to comfort her by

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alluding to the fact that I was to be allowed to visit her as often as I chose.

"And you *will* come to see me?" she exclaimed, seizing my hand, and looking up in my face as if I had been the most undutiful of sons, and a voluntary return to Guildford was the last thing I was likely to contemplate. "You *will* come sometimes to see your poor neglected mother, who is deserted by all her children, one after another. There is very little here to *tempt* you, Gerald," she continued, in a tone of complaint; "*I* have no horses for you to ride, or shooting to give you; but you will find no love, as you go through the world, to compare with a mother's, though you may find many who will try to make you believe otherwise."

I assured her that I knew the fact, and that no length of absence, or amount of pleasure, could make me forget it.

"Ah! perhaps you think so, Gerald," she replied, shaking her head; "but you have no idea of what you are about to encounter. Life would have been sufficiently full of danger for you, surrounded by all my watchfulness and care; but without either, and subjected to the influence of evil, what may *not* become of you?"

Her prognostications of harm, which reflected so upon my father's guardianship, nettled me, and I asked testily what evil influence she alluded to, that should attack me more than others. I was a man, I affirmed, or nearly so (as I caught my sisters' smile), and born to fight my way through the world as men had done before me; and I supposed that I must learn to take care of myself, as they had. But Lady Mary only

sighed, and looked mysteriously towards her daughters, and said she would speak with me on the subject by-and-by.

The "by-and-by" came the evening before I left her, when she entered my room after I had retired to rest, and carefully closed the door. In her hand she held a parcel of books.

"I want you to make me a promise, Gerald, before you go," she said gravely, as she sat down on the edge of the bed. "You will doubtless be often left to spend the evenings in your father's house by yourself: it would not have been so *here;* but that question is now a futile one. Will you promise me that in such a case you will stay at home and amuse yourself with some innocent employment, instead of treading the streets of London alone?"

She looked anxiously for a reply; but I hesitated to give the desired promise: it was too much to expect from a lad of sixteen, and I tried to evade it by asking her what harm she feared would befall me from going out by myself.

"What harm?" she exclaimed, "my dear boy, you have no idea of the harm! London is a mass of pitfalls for inexperienced feet like yours; you will meet with idle and vicious companions; you will be beset by temptations to drink and gamble; and you will be lured into places, the very thought of which makes me shudder, where you will both hear and see such things as will unfit you ever after for association with the pure and innocent."

This was rather an exaggerated statement, and it defeated its end by considerably raising my anxiety to reach a place which abounded with such novel sights

and sounds. For I had never been to London to stay; and thanks to my having spent my summers in the country, I was as innocent as it is possible for a boy who has passed through Eton to be. Notwithstanding my curiosity, however, to be initiated in the horrors of which my mother spoke, I told her, and I meant what I said, that I would never be induced to swear, drink, or gamble; and that, if possible, I would spend my solitary evenings beneath the shelter of my father's roof.

"And never, dear Gerald," continued my monitress earnestly, "make the promiscuous acquaintance of any one you may meet, nor take notice of what strangers may say to you, either men or women, particularly the latter. You will see many such in London, Gerald, whom no respectable people speak to; who are outcasts from society, and who will try to make you as bad as themselves. But, however attractive they may appear, you will promise me to shun their company nor permit them to lead you astray."

Did she design to secure my virtue by such a warning? If so, it was not palpable enough to serve her turn, with one of my tender years. I looked her full in the face as she stopped speaking, and without a blush (for the unconscious of evil do not blush) assured her that I would act as she desired me — that I had no wish to make the acquaintance of any one I might meet in the street, and no intention of doing so.

"I have selected these few books for you, Gerald, as a parting present, and perhaps on some of the solitary evenings I have alluded to you may be induced to glance over them. They are not such as you will

see in your father's bookcase; that is the reason why I chose them; you will find plenty of frivolous literature there, but nothing that will prove of service to your soul; it is your mother alone who thinks of that. Take these then, my dear boy; study them well: peruse them with prayer: and they will be blessed to you. And now, don't forget to read your Bible every day, and to pray as I have taught you to do."

I promised her earnestly that I would comply with her last request, and I think I may say, that notwithstanding the careless life that has since been mine, I have never entirely broken that promise. A man must be utterly hardened through whose lips a prayer never passes, even though he has forgotten to use the forms of devotion.

I was to stay a fortnight with my father before I went to Woolwich, for several preliminaries had to be gone through before I could be entered at the college. I found him living in his new house in Brook Street, which although not large (he said a small house was so much more cosy for him and me) was handsomely furnished and replete with every comfort. A saddle horse was kept for my use, a man to attend me, and a suite of apartments was reserved expressly for myself. I was quite awed at first by my importance, but my father soon set me at ease. "Your grandfather's death has left us very comfortable, Gerald; and I intend in future that we shall both live like gentlemen. This is your home, remember, my boy; and whatever you want you have but to ask for. I have only two pieces of advice to give you — don't gamble; and if you get into any other sort of scrape, come to me."

Remembering the style in which my father had always lived at Grasslands, it was curious to hear him speak in such a strain of humility. I had yet to learn that mortal ideas and wishes are ever ready to keep pace with the wealth of him who conceives them.

I had not been in town a day before I perceived that my father was so much engaged that it was very likely the lonely evenings my mother anticipated for me would come to pass. He was dwelling now in the midst of his own friends; revelling in literary *réunions*, parliamentary dinners, and fashionable assemblies, and had all his time fully taken up. He shut himself up in his writing-room all the mornings, a snug den at the back of the house, divided by a heavy *portière* from the front apartment; into which only such as had business with him were admitted. His afternoons he spent at the club; and although he was good enough to devote himself, for the first few evenings, to my amusement, his multifarious engagements were not to be put off longer. The Lyndons and Claremonts were both in town, and made me more than welcome to their houses; but they were speeding the parting season with a succession of routs and evening parties, and I was too unused to society to find any pleasure in visiting them, except in the mornings. I was terribly shy, like most schoolboys, of encountering the ogress, woman; particularly when she appeared as a noun of multitude in a low dress, and made me feel uncommonly small by her patronage. My cousin, Jack Lascelles, had already returned to Woolwich; and on the fourth evening after my arrival in Brook Street, when I had taken my dinner in solitary state, with two pairs of eyes watching with eagerness each morsel

that went down my throat, and an ominous silence pervading the dining-room which I longed at last to break, if only by a sneeze, I wished that my father had sent me there at once. I had walked a little way by myself that morning, but I had not known where to go, everything in London was so strange to me; and I had ridden with my father in the Park in the afternoon, still I felt intensely dull; and realized, as I found myself alone with the polished mahogany and a couple of decanters, that there might be stupider things in creation than talking to my mother and sisters in the little drawing-room at Guildford. Thinking of my mother brought her last request into my mind, and I rose mechanically, and going upstairs, proceeded to find the parcel of books she had given me, and which still lay unopened in one of my trunks. But they were not such as she should have chosen for a boy, even had she been assured that theology possessed an interest for me; for, on investigating their contents, I found that the selection consisted of deep treatises, and disquisitions on the prophecies, the book of Revelation and the Millennium, which was her favourite study; folios of closely-printed matter which required a Reference Bible side by side with them, and which were not always intelligible even with that aid. Agreeably to my promise, I tried to wade through part of one of them, but it proved too much for me, and I fell asleep over the pages, only to wake again at the entrance of coffee; after which I was sufficiently young to go to bed, and to sleep in right earnest. The following evening my father appeared before me again, dressed for visiting, and expressed his regret that I could not accompany him. "But I am chiefly engaged for din-

ners now, Gerald — heavy, stupid affairs, at which you would scarcely find yourself at home, were it possible to take you with me. But you amuse yourself, my boy, I hope. There are plenty of theatres open to you; and if you want money, you have only to tell me so. Or, either Beatrice or Gertrude will always be delighted to see you. What did you do last night?"

"I stayed at home, father, and read."

"Did you? — well: books are worth all the plays in the world, but boys don't generally think so. Don't mope yourself, that's all," and with a cheerful "good-night" he left me. His words were a sore temptation to me to sally forth in quest of some amusement also; and for a little while I felt as if I could not stay by myself for another evening. I took up the "Times," and read over the names of the pieces running at the various theatres, and knew that I had only to call a cab and drive to any one of them in order to enjoy myself, but my affection for my mother deterred me. It seemed so soon to forget her parting request. When I went into my room before dinner, I found that my man had laid out my evening clothes, evidently expecting that I should require them, but I did not dress. I was trying to do what I considered my duty, but I was sulky with my duty nevertheless. So I dined in my morning attire; and when the ceremony was concluded I sat down to write a letter to my mother, in which I represented how very dull I felt all alone, and asked her if she ranked theatres amongst the places of which she had spoken to me. When I had finished my letter, I thought I should like to post it myself. A servant met me in the hall and offered

to do so for me, but I knew where the post was situated, and I longed to go out for a minute and breathe the cool evening air. How pleasant it was to hear the hall door close after me as a matter of course, and to feel that if I chose I was free to go where I listed. "Cab, sir?" inquired a passing hansom as I set my feet upon the pavement. I was sorry to be obliged to answer "No," yet a sense of superior manhood came over me, as I heard the question. The cabman evidently thought it the most natural thing in the world that I should be driving about at night alone, as other men did; and would have laughed, doubtless, at the very idea of my staying in the house because a woman had asked me to do so. I posted my letter, and was walking homeward through the maze of cabs and carriages which rolled past one after another, wondering if my mother would think it very wrong if I took a hansom, and drove about the lighted streets for an hour or so, when I was startled out of my reverie by a hearty slap on the shoulder, and looking up found my hand grasped by that of my cousin, George Lascelles. I had not seen him for two years, as he had been travelling abroad, being destined for the diplomacy, but I recognized him at once, notwithstanding that the most fragile of whiskers and moustaches already adorned his handsome face.

"Why, Jerry, my boy!" he exclaimed ("Jerry" being the only name by which the brothers knew me), "where are you off to? I was just going to your house. I came over from Paris yesterday and heard from Lyndon, this morning, that you were in town. How are you, old fellow? Why, you've "grow'd out of knowledge.'"

How glad I was to see him! I stood there, under the lamplight, shaking his hand, and smiling delightedly in his face, until the passers-by must have thought I had just found a long-lost brother.

"I never expected to see you, George; I did not even know that you were coming to England. I *am* so pleased: I was longing for a friend this evening. Do come back to the house and stay with me a little while; I have so much to say to you."

"Of course I will, old chap — that's the only thing I came for. And how do you like town, Jerry? been dissipating like fun, I suppose. You're a nice boy, you are; how pleased your mother would be to see you. I hardly expected to find you at home; but I suppose it's too early for you to begin your larks, eh! you young dog?"

So he rattled on, his arm through mine, until we reached my father's house and stood together in the dining-room. Then I had opportunity to examine him and see what changes time had made. None at all, or only for the better: there were the same frank blue eyes; the same good-tempered countenance which had beamed on me on the first day I went to Eton. He was now twenty years old. What a man he appeared to green sixteen, as he stood showing all his teeth at my unaffected pleasure in the meeting. He seemed to me to know everything and to have been everywhere. He talked of Paris, of Italy, of Vienna; discussed operas, masked balls, and races; and had the names of all the most celebrated people, politicians, authors, and actors on the tip of his tongue. An hour slipped away in this style, and then George started up and said he must go.

"Where are you bound for to-night, Jerry?" he asked, "because we may as well travel in company. I promised to meet a friend at Evans's, but that will not take two minutes, after which I shall be at your service."

"I am not going out again this evening, thank you," I said in answer; "I am rather interested in my book" — touching a novel of Dickens's as I spoke — "and I think I will stay at home and read."

George Lascelles burst out laughing.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Jerry, *credat Judæus!* You are a very sharp boy, aren't you? Now I'll be bound you are up to some mischief; however, you can trust me, old fellow, as you know of old."

I hastened to assure him that I knew that well, but that he was mistaken in fancying there was any need of it in the present instance. I was not joking; I really intended to stay in for that evening.

"But why?" he urged. "Don't you care for the theatre? There are some first-rate pieces on now, and you cannot have seen them all. Come on, Jerry; don't be lazy; we'll go in half price to the Princess's."

But still I stood out against his proposal, although it was very hard for me to do so. My pride would not permit me to tell him the reason which kept me at home; I was so afraid that he should laugh at me, and yet I could not honestly aver that I had no inclination to attend such places as he spoke of. At last I was driven to resort to a subterfuge, and plead fatigue from walking as an excuse for my obstinacy; after which my cousin left me, but with a laughing vow upon his tongue that it should be the last time he would accept

such an apology — left me very disappointed, half ashamed of my own fortitude, and altogether disposed to feel rebellious against the authority which had imposed so hard a task upon me.

CHAPTER VIII.

My father was so deeply engaged on the following day that I did not see him even at breakfast. His orders against interruption whilst in his study were so strict that I dared not disobey them; so, as I wished to speak to him about having seen my cousin George the evening before, and had some faint idea of confiding to him my mother's warning and asking his opinion on the subject, I sent in my name like any ordinary visitor, and took up my station in the antechamber of his writing-room until he should be at leisure to attend to me. There were only two occupants of the apartment as I entered it: one was an old man with grey hair, who sat apart, looking rather uncomfortable with his hat in his hand; the other, a young fellow whose face seemed familiar to me, although I scarcely cared to recall where I had seen it for it, was a freckled face surrounded with sandy hair, which, according to my ideas, had something repulsive in its expression. I had brought my book with me, and lay extended on the sofa, reading, utterly oblivious of my companions, until I was roused by my father himself, who lifted the heavy curtain which divided the rooms, and came forward with some proofs in his hand, which he gave to the old man with the grey hair.

"You will find those right, Mr. Nelson, I believe," he said, hurriedly, and then, as the messenger rose and

bowed himself out of the room, my father turned with a perturbed face to see who else was waiting to speak to him. I rose from the sofa.

"Well, Logan, what is it?"

He was addressing the sandy-haired young man, and as I heard his name the recollection of who he was flashed across me. It was Thomas Logan, now a clerk in some city firm, whom I had never met since the first summer I visited Grasslands. He mentioned the business he came on, which concerned his father, and mine, having quickly despatched it, was about to dismiss him, when he suddenly remembered my presence.

"You know your cousin Gerald, Logan; don't you?"

At this I felt bound to come forward, which I did though unwillingly, for there was that in Thomas Logan's eye which said plainly that the old childish feud was not forgotten. He thrust forth, however, an ungloved hand and shook mine nervelessly, regarding me the while with a look of suspicion.

"We have met before," he said; "but if I remember right we were not much of friends."

"Nor are likely to be," I replied, withdrawing my hand, "since you the take trouble to remind me of it," and then, as my father was beating a retreat into his own den, I left Thomas Logan and accosted him.

"Father, can't I speak to you?"

"No, Gerald; not now. I have every minute engaged; after luncheon, my boy, if I should be at home," and the *portière* closed upon him as he spoke. Turning round, I found that my cousin had already left the room, and I was glad of it; it saved me the trouble of pretending to be civil to him, when I had

no inclination. At luncheon I looked for my father in vain, and soon after I saw him drive away in the carriage.

"Mr. Estcourt's orders, sir, are that should he not have returned by six o'clock, his dress clothes are to be taken to the club." Such was the only information I could extract from his personal attendant, and therefore I concluded that another solitary evening was to be my portion. I went to my sister, Lady Lyndon's, in hopes of seeing my friend George, but he was from home, and I heard was engaged out to dinner that night in company with themselves, so I drove to Beatrice's house instead, and found that they were preparing for a *soirée musicale*, at which she asked me to "look in" after my dinner. A *soirée musicale* was not much in my way, but I preferred braving the ordeal of ladies' society to spending another evening alone, so I accepted the offer and returned to Brook Street, wondering if the change would be for the better. It was something though to be able to tell my man that I was going out, and to array myself in one of those embroidered shirts and that new tail-coat, of which I was so proud. I ate my dinner with a better appetite and more ease, feeling that my character for manliness was being redeemed in the servant's eyes, and sipped my port afterwards, trying to realise the sensation of a man about town, who was too *blasé* of theatres and such everyday places, to care to do more than just lounge in to his sisters' receptions, when it suited his convenience to do so. Beatrice had warned the "man about town" not to make his appearance until ten o'clock, and therefore I was still engaged at this little farce when a carriage stopped at the door; I heard the

familiar sound of my father's latch-key as it turned in the lock, and in another moment he entered the room hurriedly.

"Gerald, why wouldn't you go out with George Lascelles last night?"

I was so taken aback by the abruptness of the question that nothwithstanding my half-formed intention of mentioning the subject to him I could only rise from my chair and look conscious under the examination of his eyes.

"I have just come from dining with your cousin at the Hautevilles," he continued, "and am on my way to Lady Mannering's soirée. I had no idea you had been moping at home in this manner. It is my own fault though. I should have deputed some young fellow to take you out in the evenings and show you what is to be seen."

"It was my own wish, father," I said, unhesitatingly; "I told George so last night."

"Your own wish; nonsense!" he exclaimed. "What, have you no desire to go to the theatres and other places of amusement, Gerald?"

"Yes, of course I have," I answered; "but the fact is, father, my mother was so afraid I should get into harm, and she spoke so earnestly to me about it, the night before I came here, that I did not like to go directly against her wishes."

Although I never introduced the subject of my mother in my father's presence, unless it was necessary, I had overcome my dread of mentioning her name before him, and he had overcome in a measure his aversion to hear it.

"What did your mother want you to do?" he asked quickly.

"She asked me to promise to spend the evenings at home, unless you took me anywhere; but I could not quite do that, only I said I would try and remember her request that I should go nowhere by myself."

"So you have spent your evenings alone because your mother asked you to do so?" he said, presently.

"Yes; but only for that reason, father," I replied, fearful lest he should interpret my stay-at-home qualities into a want of manliness. "Mamma felt parting with me very much, and I said that I would *try*."

"You are a good boy, Gerald," he said, kindly, "and so far, you have done right; but I am not going to have you turned into a milksop for your mother or any one else. She thought that she was right, doubtless, in the prohibition she tried to lay on you; but a woman is perfectly unable to judge in such matters, simply because she is such. Her sphere is at home; ours, in the world: in most cases she has men to lean on and to be advised by in all phases of her existence. We have to walk alone and take care of ourselves. In order to do this, we must not only begin to see the world early but we must see it in all its lights and shadows. If we are to journey through life without stumbling, we must know where the pitfalls are; and if we would avoid being taken in, we cannot learn too soon to imitate the sharpness of our neighbours. Your mother, like many another, would try to keep you straight by not permitting you to walk by yourself, and the first time you went alone, you'd fall. My plan is altogether a different one. I shall treat you as they

do people who are learning to skate; set you up on your feet and then you may shove along as best you can; and if your experience comes to you after a few tumbles they will be no more than what every one has had to encounter. George has kindly promised to call for you in the course of an hour, and I just ran in, on my way, to tell you to be ready for him."

"But I have promised to go to Beatrice to-night, father; she has a musical party, and asked me to join it."

"A musical party! faugh! what have you in common with Italian *bravuras* and sonatas in D, Gerald? Ladies' society will be everything to you by-and-by; but you are too young to mix in it yet. The music will intensely bore you; and the women will pronounce you a 'cub' at the first glance, and never look your way again. You had much better go with George, and rub some of your greenness off, before you make a fool of yourself in company."

I was not flattered by my father's remarks, and my own inclination was of course towards going with my cousin; so after receiving my thanks for his kindness, and assurances that for the future I would be led by himself, he proceeded on his way to Lady Mannering's party.

Whether the system of my mother or of my father, for my moral education, was the right one, I leave my readers to decide: probably his reckless method of throwing me on the world only a little hastened the end which her impracticable prudence would a little have retarded; but, judging from the effects of both plans, I think, had I sons of an age to commence

learning the great lesson of life, that I should adopt the happy medium.

I had not to wait long for my cousin: about ten o'clock, in he rushed, buoyant and joyous as ever, and seemingly glad to exchange the stiff formality of public society for the office of *cicerone* to even a "cub" like myself.

"That's right, old fellow," he exclaimed, as he saw I was ready to accompany him; "I told your father I should look you up again, but I half expected to find you still intent upon that interesting novel. Come along! night is not the time for reading, Jerry, you'll spoil your eyes."

I followed him into the hansom. How excited I felt as we rattled over the stones together!

"Going to see something of 'life' now, Jerry, eh?" said George, clapping me on the back; "going to have your first peep into the enchanted ground; your first taste of the intoxicating draught. Ah! I wish I was a young fellow like yourself, and had it all to begin over again. It's very charming when it's novel, but one does get so confoundedly tired of it in time."

He leaned back in the cab as he spoke, and languidly stroked his very passable nose, this votary of pleasure, used-up at the age of twenty. Of course his nonchalance was all assumed for my benefit; but I was young and credulous, and conceived a still greater awe for a system which could produce such marvellous effects in so short a time, and longed to commence my own career of dissipation, and become as blissfully indifferent to all things as George appeared to be. To what scenes I expected to be introduced I hardly knew; but as the cab stopped at the entrance of the first place

to which my cousin took me, I almost trembled in the eagerness of my anticipation.

* * * *

"Well, Jerry, how have you enjoyed yourself?" said George, as, after some three or four hours of *life*, he set me down at my father's house again. I laughed, and told him "very much;" but when I asked myself the same question, I knew that I had been terribly disappointed at the result of my first dissipation. I had a bad headache from the unusual heat and noise, and from having drunk more than I was accustomed to drink; and I had not been half so amused as I had expected to be. Throughout my life I have been laughed at for affecting too fastidious a taste; but I am convinced that such was born with me. Boy as I was, the coarseness of language and gesture by which I was surrounded on that first occasion of my seeing "real life" struck me with a painful sense of disgust, a feeling which many years' mixing in such scenes has never had the power to obliterate. I have lived the life of other men, frequenting the same haunts, and being brought in contact with the same company, but I have never assimilated myself to such an existence. To this day, a blasphemous allusion from the mouth of a man, or an impure expression from the lips of a woman, makes me shudder, as I shuddered on first hearing them. Besides, I did not feel any older or more wicked than I had done before I went; and when I thought that, after all, it was more fun being a boy than a man, I doubt if my conclusion was so widely different from that of other lads on their introduction to such scenes. A dissipated life is not natural to us: it is an

acquired taste, like that of smoking, and when once acquired, as difficult to break through as any of the minor vices it brings in its train. From that evening I went out regularly with my father or cousin, or by myself. The disappointment I had experienced was not strong enough to disenchant me in the pursuit of pleasure: I had heard so much of its existence, that I believed, with perseverance, I should find it, and enjoy myself as much as others did. I tried my dissipation as I did my cigar, until both from being distasteful became necessary to me; and the blush of conscious evil had even ceased to suffuse my face, as my mother made vain attempts to draw from me a statement of the measures I had adopted in order to carry out the plan she had recommended to me.

But meanwhile, and before the result I have alluded to was attained, I had to go to Woolwich, where my efforts to acquire a knowledge of the world were considerably aided by the laudable example, companionship, and experience of my cousin Jack. From that date, the growth of my ideas kept pace with my stature; and another couple of twelvemonths saw a considerable advance made in both. At eighteen I had passed examination for the Artillery, and was nearly six feet high: and so proud was my father of both circumstances, that he made me apply for leave to do duty at Woolwich, that he might keep his *rara avis* near himself for a little while longer.

George Lascelles had already entered upon his diplomatic appointment, and his brother Jack had been ordered to Plymouth; but we often met. The two years which succeeded my entering the army were very gay ones. I had quite overcome my diffidence to mix

in the society of ladies, and was sufficiently conceited to believe that there was no longer any fear of their styling me a "cub;" consequently, as I was exceedingly fond of dancing, I attended balls and parties nightly during the season, where, thanks to my juvenility and my harmlessness (as far as matrimony was concerned), the most prudent mothers were not startled to see my name down for two or three dances on the engagement-cards of their pretty daughters. I was on the most intimate terms with the family of Lord Portsdowne, being always treated as a son of the house; and naturally I figured at every entertainment given by my sisters Beatrice and Gertrude. The former was now in the zenith of her beauty, and was really a noble-looking woman, with a brilliancy of face and manner that attracted most people; the mother, likewise, of a family of children, who promised in future years to rival her own charms. Gertrude, who, less handsome than Beatrice, was yet prettier, took after the Lascelles', and was fair and blue-eyed, with a character that won rather than subdued. She was gayer also than her sister, almost inclined, indeed, to be "fast;" on which subject she and I used to have fierce disputes. Like all young people who have been too strictly brought up, she scarcely knew, now that she held the reins in her own hands, when to check her frolicsome fancy; and she had no notion of being called to account for her actions by a brother of my age, so that my lectures did more harm than good; but Gertrude was too thorough to go beyond the appearance of evil. Through them I had the *entrée* to some of the best houses in London, and was always mixing in society. What was then my chagrin, in the very midst of my po-

pularity and pleasure, to receive an order from the Horse Guards, appointing me to do duty at Freshwave.

"Freshwave!" I exclaimed petulantly to my father, when the document reached me, "where the devil *is* Freshwave?"

He laughed at my discomfiture. He was on the sofa at the time, with an attack of gout, to which of late years he had become subject.

"Ignoramus!" he replied; "Freshwave is in the Isle of Wight: it's time you had a little leisure, Gerald, if only to enable you to get up your geography."

"Who ever heard of the place?" I repeated. "Father, can't you get this altered for me? I don't want to leave Woolwich just yet."

"No, Gerald," he replied seriously, "let it stand; it is much better as it is. You have had a long spell of pleasure, my boy, and a little rest will do you no harm. Besides, the season is over now, and it can make but slight difference where you are. Freshwave is a charming little seaside quarter, where you can live quietly, and have time to study, and recruit your health after the late hours you have been keeping."

"Time to cut my throat, you mean," I rejoined sulkily.

"I mean no such thing, and I trust you have too much sense to speak seriously. You know, Gerald, that, notwithstanding you have entered the army, I have not relinquished my hope and intention that you should pursue a literary career. You are too young yet to appear in print; but there is much practice required before such an end is even desirable. You have now had a few years' experience of life, turn it to ac-

count, and employ the leisure which I anticipate for you at Freshwave, in trying your hand at composition. Your first attempts will be crude; but you will soon feel your feet, and be able to tell of what you are capable. If, eventually, you should find your country quarters unbearable, I dare say we shall be able to get some other arrangement made. In the meanwhile, you had best run down to Guildford and see your mother; and try to be contented with the prospect before you."

And with this advice my father despatched me to Freshwave, and I have never quite satisfied myself that he was not the proximate cause of my being ordered there.

CHAPTER IX.

At the time appointed I crossed to the Isle of Wight, and being landed in the very worst of humours at a little town called Starmouth, which was redolent of stale fish and beer, found that I was four miles from Freshwave, and that a coach which met each steamboat was waiting to convey me there. It was a lovely evening in July, and the mere beauty of the ground we traversed was sufficient to cause pleasure to any one less disposed to cavil at his surroundings than I was. Trees, at every bend in the road, which met in natural arches overhead, forming avenues of shade through which the glories of the setting sun slanted, painting streaks of light on every leaf; cottages, the roofs of which were hid by clustering roses, and the porches bowered with honeysuckle; and hedges, the landmarks of the country, which twinkled with stars of white and pink and blue, met the eye on every side. Presently we came upon the village of Freshwave, lying embosomed in verdure, the old grey church in its midst, keeping watch like a sentinel over the morals of the parish: but my destination was a mile and a half further on. Country-houses, enclosed in their own grounds, skirted the road for the remainder of the distance, and then was apparent a broad blue strip of sea; a flat line of shingly beach, fronted by green downs, upon which were scattered perhaps half a dozen lodging-houses, and with a prolonged flourish on the horn, the yellow-bodied coach

which had had the honour of conveying me there, drew up at the door of a long, low, ivy-covered hotel, built almost upon the beach, and my journey was accomplished. The arrival of the coach was evidently a matter of no slight interest to the aborigines of Freshwave, for the front of the hotel was immediately alive with people, eager to watch the descent of the newly-arrived passengers. I was one of the first to leave my seat on the coach-box, and as I did so I stepped back against some one. Turning to apologise, I recognised, to my astonishment, Thomas Logan.

"Why, what the deuce are *you* doing here?" I said, almost forgetting my ill-humour in my surprise. He looked wonderfully confused, considering that our movements were of little consequence to one another; grew red, stammered, and finally answered my question by putting the same to me.

"What are you here for yourself?"

"I am appointed to do duty with a detachment of the X battery, and have come to join."

He looked still more uncomfortable when he heard this, but merely remarked, "Oh, I was not aware of that."

"Are you staying at this hotel?" I continued.

"Yes, I am for the present."

"How long have you been here?"

"Not long. I have a few weeks' holiday, and I thought I'd spend them by the sea."

"Queer place to choose though, is'nt it? When do you move?"

"I don't know; I am not sure; I haven't decided yet." So he went on in a shuffling kind of manner, until I grew tired of speculating on his meaning, and

directed my attention to my luggage. A hand touched my shoulder.

"I beg your pardon — is your name Estcourt?"

"It is."

"I am Hodson, of the X battery. Come on and report yourself to Graham. We mess at seven." So taking the arm of my new friend, I sauntered away from the ivy-covered hotel, without expressing a wish to see Thomas Logan again.

I found that the detachment consisted of two subalterns, besides myself, under the command of Captain Graham. They all appeared very good fellows, and gave me as hearty a welcome as I could desire; and we spent a pleasant evening together in the billiard room of the above-mentioned hotel, so that I retired to rest thinking that a residence at Freshwave might, after all, be bearable. But it is not possible to play billiards all day; and the duty was light, and left a wide margin of leisure for discontent.

"Confoundedly dull hole!" remarked Hodson as we lounged the next day, with our cigars in our mouths, upon the downs which rose immediately above our tiny quarters.

"Deucedly slow," echoed, with a slight variation, the other subaltern, whose name was Aynsworth. I puffed in silence, pondering on what they said. Whatever its attributes for cheerfulness, Freshwave certainly did not look much of a "hole" at the point from which we viewed it. The fort was built in a cutting of the cliff, some distance above the beach and lodging-houses; so that, from the position we occupied, we looked down upon them both. Before us lay the calm, blue, glassy water, from which, at intervals, rose sundry fantas-

tically-shaped rocks; and all along the coast the precipitous white cliffs abruptly cut off the beach, until it was a mere fringe of shingles. Far away stretched the pathless, and apparently interminable downs, broken only by patches of golden furze, whilst immediately beneath us lay the handful of stones and sand which called itself Freshwave Gate, and which looked smiling enough beneath the influence of a summer's morning, dotted over with white bathing-machines and pleasure-boats, and little children busy with their spades and puckets.

"There seem to be very few visitors here," I remarked.

"Very few," said Hodson; "there's no accommodation for them; however, the place is full now, and there are one or two very pretty girls staying at the hotel, only it's so difficult to get acquainted with them. Do you see that young lady down there, just going to enter the bathing-machine?"

I glanced in the direction he indicated, and could just distinguish the figure of a girl, in a dark cloak and hat, who was speaking to an old bathing-man on the beach.

"Yes; what of her?"

"She's the best lady swimmer I've ever met. You'll see her come out, by-and-by, and take her 'header.' Aynsworth, have you the 'binoculars?'"

Mr. Aynsworth was lying at full length on the grass, with his hat over his eyes, but he had the goodness to change his position and exert himself sufficiently to produce the articles in question. Mr. Hodson immediately adapted them to his own sight.

"It's the only fun in Freshwave," he continued, "to watch the women bathe. They can't see us from

this distance, you know. Now, Estcourt, here she comes. There's a 'header!' Isn't that splendid for a woman? and she will swim out a tremendous distance, too."

I am not an advocate for men watching ladies whilst they bathe; on the contrary, I have always considered the act an ungentlemanly one; but I confess I had sufficient curiosity to witness the skill of this stranger, to induce me to accept the offer of Hodson as he placed the glasses in my hands. His statement was perfectly correct; the swimmer, considering her sex, was a remarkable one. Every stroke told; and she had no ungainly action of the feet, as many women display in practising the art. I watched her motions with pleasure until she turned on her back to rest herself, and then as her profile rose above the surface of the water, I started and lowered the glasses from my eyes, exclaiming —

"I've seen that girl before, Hodson; I know her face."

"Do you?" he returned; "I dare say you may have met her in London; she's a Miss Rivers — daughter of Colonel Rivers of the 50th — you know; they're a queer lot altogether, I believe: he has just married for the third time, and this girl is staying here with the governess and children. *Her* mother, the first wife, bolted years ago with Lord Something-or-other in the same regiment; you must remember the row there was about it, Estcourt, in the papers."

But my memory did not date back so far as ten or twelve years before — neither do I suspect did Mr. Hodson's — and I was thinking, not of the antecedents of this girl's mother, but where, and under what cir-

cumstances, I had met the girl herself and seen the face which was floating on the water.

"Miss Rivers seems quiet enough," remarked Aynsworth; "Hodson has been dodging her about to try and make her acquaintance, but he can't manage it."

Hodson grew very red, and said that was all Aynsworth knew about it; for, as it happened, he had never even wished to make her acquaintance, for there wouldn't be much fun in it since the governess and children followed her wherever she went.

"Rivers — Rivers" — I could not remember the name, although the features seemed so familiar to me. But I had danced and flirted with so many girls during the two past seasons, that it was not wonderful if a few of their names escaped me. Yet the thought occupied me until the young lady had re-entered the bathing-machine, and Hodson proposed that we should adjourn to the beach and await her appearance there.

"You'll have a good opportunity of looking at her then, Estcourt, and if you *have* met her before, she will probably recognize you." So we did as he said and seated ourselves on a boat at a little distance from where her machine was drawn up. Three children, who were, as Hodson whispered me, her half-sisters by the second marriage, were playing about close to us, whilst the governess, Miss Hardy, a prim-looking individual with a pursed-up mouth, sat within speaking distance, affecting to be intently engaged upon her book, but glancing up every now and then from beneath her sunshade to see if our admiration of her was becoming too marked.

Presently the door of the machine was flung open, and Miss Rivers crossed the tremulous plank which

divided her from the beach. Directly I saw her in her ordinary attire, even though her hair was hanging down her back, I remembered that we had danced together several times during the previous season, and instinctively I rose at her approach from the boat on which I was seated. She glanced my way, her attention directed towards me, probably by the change in my position, but no gleam of recognition came into her eyes, and she walked quietly on to the spot where her little sisters were playing and threw herself down upon the shingles. A feeling of mortification crept over me, for my prevailing fault was vanity, and I reseated myself, with a disposition to answer sharply when Hodson whispered to me —

"I say, Estcourt, she's forgotten all about you," and a temptation to deny that I had ever set eyes on the young lady before.

But our attention was diverted by a colloquy which commenced between Miss Rivers and the governess.

"Would it not be more prudent, Miss Rivers, to move about a little after leaving the water, instead of sitting down?" inquired Miss Hardy in measured tones.

"I prefer sitting down," was the careless answer.

"In my opinion it provokes a tendency to catch cold."

"Does it?"

"And you were complaining only last evening of a slight deafness," continued the governess. Miss Rivers, looking over the water, smiled to herself. I saw the expression, and fancied I could guess the reason she had so complained. But she only turned to one of

the little girls and said, "Georgie, run up to the hotel and fetch me my book; I left it on the dressing-table."

Miss Hardy rose at once.

"You must really allow me to accompany Georgina, Miss Rivers, or to fetch the volume myself. I scarcely think your papa would approve of young ladies running in and out of a public hotel by themselves."

"Just as you like," replied Miss Rivers.

"Have you no objection to be left alone?"

"*Alone!* why should I?" was the interrogative answer. Miss Hardy walked off, murmuring something about "so public a place" and "the number of strangers" (with a glance at ourselves) "that one was brought in contact with;" but Miss Rivers had clasped her hands round her knees, and, still looking thoughtfully over the sea, appeared to have another attack of the deafness she had complained of the evening before. As I looked at her thus, I remembered her perfectly and every circumstance under which we had met at the house of my sister Beatrice; even the judgment which I had then privately passed upon the young lady before me. It is universally acknowledged that to convey by pen-and-ink description a correct idea of more than the mere outline of a human form is almost an impossibility; therefore when I have said that Miss Rivers was fair and tall, with grey eyes and brown hair, I feel tempted to say no more for fear of saying too much. Yet I will add that her features, without being heavy, had no sharpness of outline; her figure was full yet graceful, and her eyes, though habitually filled with an expression of languor, burned with a steady light which redeemed them from all charge of sleepi-

ness. But the most animated part of her face was her mouth, which, not too large to lack beauty and not too small to lack sense, was constantly on the move. As I watched her looking across the channel waters, I saw the nervous lips curl and uncurl themselves, part company and press together as the various thoughts contained in a space of five minutes passed through her busy brain. Then I spoke to Hodson, hoping that she might recognize my voice or he might use my name.

"Shall we go in for a game at pool?"

"With all my heart: come on!"

She did not move a muscle, although I had spoken loudly. As we moved away, Hodson laughed in a disagreeable manner; and I felt nettled at it, heaven knows why, and resolved that Miss Rivers *should* remember and recognize me if it were possible to make her do so. I played badly; lost a lot of money; and wrote to my father, telling him that Freshwave was the most abominable place I had ever set eyes on; and that Logan was down there, and looked such a "cad" I was ashamed to acknowledge him for a relation.

The next morning I strolled down to the beach alone, and seated myself at a little distance from the spot where sat Miss Rivers with the governess and the children. I had a rough terrier with me, and I employed myself by throwing stones into the water for him, which he pursued for a short way into the surf, and then, losing sight of, barked at vociferously. One of the little Rivers, a child of about five years old, had a painted ball, which she was tossing about the shingles; and presently Tip seemed to imagine that the

plaything was also thrown for his benefit, and seizing hold of it, brought it to me. This was a grand opportunity. I took forcible possession of the ball, and in another minute the little girl was walking timidly round me, desirous, but not courageous enough, to ask for her property.

"That's my ball, please!" she at last summoned up daring to say.

"Is it?" I replied, turning on my arm, so that Miss Rivers might have the full benefit of a personal inspection of me, "and who are you?"

"I'm Flora; and it's my ball that your little dog took."

"Flora what?"

"Flora Rivers. Please give me my ball back again."

"I will if you will give me a kiss for it." The child advanced and put her little lips to mine, and I delivered the ball to her, just as Miss Hardy came bustling up to my side.

"*Flora*" — in a tone of horrified propriety — "come away *directly;* how often have I forbidden you to speak to strangers!" And with a kick to the unoffending Tip, the governess conveyed Miss Flora away from my side. The dog howled, and I heard Miss Rivers' voice rising dignified and cold above the general tumult.

"I think you had better learn manners yourself, Miss Hardy, before you attempt to teach them to the children." After which there was a dead silence, and I rose and sauntered away. I had hoped this little episode would have been quite unnoticed from the fort, but I found out my mistake.

"Who's dodging Miss Rivers now, Estcourt?" exclaimed Hodson as soon as I had rejoined them. "However, I tell you it's no good; you might as well follow the Sphynx." But I repudiated the accusation with scorn, and was more discontented with my new quarters than before.

The next day was Sunday, and as a matter of course we all went to church with the men. It was a countrified little building, with rafters in the roof, high-backed, worm-eaten pews, and whitewashed walls. It was, moreover, excessively full; and though we, as officers of the garrison, had no difficulty in procuring seats, many of the visitors to Freshwave were standing in the aisle. Presently I observed Miss Rivers and her party being marshalled by the old pew-opener into the body of the church, where she left them, evidently not knowing where to put them. Miss Rivers looked uncomfortable, as every one does in such a position; and without further preface I left my seat, and holding the pew-door open, motioned to her to take my place. The governess plucked at her mantle, as though to remonstrate with her on the impropriety of sitting in a pew with officers; but disregarding the appeal, Miss Rivers accepted my offer, and with a stately bow, passed with one of the children into my vacant seat, whilst I procured a sitting for myself in the gallery. This separation necessitated my waiting for my brother officers, when the service was over, in the porch of the church. They came out simultaneously with the Rivers party. As Miss Rivers saw me standing there in my uniform, with my cap in my hand, she raised her eyes to my face, and for the first time a gleam came into them which indicated she had met me before; and with a

blush which atoned for her forgetfulness, she bowed. I bowed in return, of course, and with an amount of pleasure at my success that caused me to be the unhappy butt for Hodson's jests for the rest of the day. On the next, however, my perseverance met with its reward. As I, purposely I admit, sought the beach at the same time as Miss Rivers, and Tip forced her to raise her eyes from her book by dashing unceremoniously across her lap, for which I sternly rebuked him, she bowed again. I raised my hat, and was passing on when her voice arrested me.

"Mr. Estcourt, I must apologize for not having recognized you before; but the fact is, if the truth must be told, I had quite forgotten your face."

I answered that it was of no consequence, although I did not think so; and that I was only too honoured by her remembering me at all. But I discontinued ploughing the shingles, and went and stood by the spot where she was sitting, digging my stick as far as I could into the sand, and making it sway backwards and forwards with my weight.

"It was very ungrateful of me," she continued, though without smiling, "considering that I met you at the house of your sister, Lady Claremont. But then one does dance with such an infinity of partners during the season that ——"

Here I interrupted her, begging she would not mention the subject again. Her case, I averred, was very different to my own; I had recognized her the moment we re-met.

"Ah! perhaps you have not been 'out' so long as I have," she replied.

She was just eighteen, and I was twenty. The

supposition wounded my pride; but I assured her that had my experience been twice as great, I could never have lost the remembrance of the evenings I had spent in her society.

"Are you devoted to dancing, then?" said Miss Rivers.

"Under some circumstances — yes."

"I never cared for it much," she replied, "at least, I like the exercise; but balls and parties are such unsatisfactory things. I have often said I will never attend another again."

"You could not be so *cruel*," I urged, in the absurd manner in which young men, ignorant of the sex, imagine women like to be addressed, "as to rob our ball-rooms of one of their brightest ornaments. Why, what should we do without you?"

But I soon saw this was not the style to conciliate Miss Rivers. Her grey eyes regarded me so coolly as she answered my question, that I felt very small beneath their gaze.

"Pray, be sensible! There are plenty of girls to take my place if I did desert you. There are women enough in the world; more than enough, God knows!"

Her tone was so earnest and unaffected that I dropped all bantering in confusion. Was this the girl with whom, enveloped by dozens of yards of gauze, I had whirled round and round in the waltz and galop? I could hardly believe it! Raising my eyes to where she now sat, in that plain washing dress, simply belted round her dainty waist, a brown straw hat shading her face, I believed it still less. Remembering the sentence which had fallen with so much touching solemnity from

her lips, I believed it least of all. And yet, to outward appearances, she was the same.

The silence was next broken by her asking me after the health of my sisters, and the rest of my family, and the reason of my being at Freshwave. Having satisfied her on these points, she spoke of themselves.

"Perhaps you have heard," she said with a sigh, "that my father, Colonel Rivers, has just married again. He has taken his wife to Italy for the honeymoon; and as the house in town is being freshly painted and papered against their return, I came down here with my sisters and the governess — my half-sisters, you know; they are not my mother's children."

I bowed to intimate that I was cognizant of the fact, although I was surprised, from what I had heard, at her mentioning the name of her mother.

"This is a pretty place," I said, "but very dull — at least, I thought it so before this morning."

"Do you think it dull?" she answered, without noticing my amendment; "I should have called it quiet; but no place can be dull where there is such beautiful scenery within walking distance. But I enjoy solitude."

Here the conversation dropped, and although I had been gifted by nature with a considerable portion of that sword wherewith to open the world's oyster, which the wise mother in the fairy tale asked three times for her new-born son, I had not impudence enough to intrude upon the leisure of a lady who appeared to have no more to say to me. So after a few commonplace sentences to wind up the interview gracefully, I left Miss Rivers's side, and made acquaintance with the little girls instead, who seemed delighted to gain me

for a companion, and romped about the beach with Tip and myself, until we had perfectly scandalised Miss Hardy. And meanwhile, the elder sister sat with her eyes bent upon her book, not a glance or smile betokening that she was even conscious of my continued presence.

CHAPTER X.

THE next day I greatly disgusted Hodson by refusing to accompany him to Starmouth on the coach. It was true, he averred, that there was nothing to be done there; but then, there was nothing to be done in Freshwave. Upon this, I argued that it must be six of one and half a dozen of the other, and it could make no difference where I spent the day. But he retorted by coarsely observing that he knew I was "going after that girl again;" and I was too young to bear such a remark with complacency, so that we nearly came to a quarrel over it. Not quite, however, for which I was glad, as Hodson, generally speaking, was a first-rate fellow. He was very hot on the subject, however, and vowed there ought to be a regulation to the effect that if officers got acquainted in a miserable hole like that with any girls worth knowing, they should either cut the concern, or introduce their brother officers to them; for it was too bad, when there were only four fellows in a place, that their plans should all be knocked on the head because one fellow chose to go "skying" after a girl at the very time that the only coach in the place started for the only other place that was worth going to. Leaving him thus spluttering and tautologous, and so offended that he would not even return my parting salute from his station on the top of the coach, I bent my steps towards the beach. It is true that my reason for not going to Starmouth was because I had

hopes of gaining another interview with Miss Rivers. She interested me: I had been thinking of her all night; and she appeared so indifferent about society, that I feared, if I did not follow up my advantage, we might lapse into mere bowing acquaintances. But as far as she was concerned, I might have done as my friend desired me. There were no signs of herself, or of her sisters, on the beach, or in the bathing-machines. I loitered about all the morning, cutting my best boots into strips upon the shingles, and getting more and more ill-tempered as the hours went on, and none of the Rivers' appeared. When luncheon time arrived, a meal for which I have never entertained a fancy, I strolled up to the bar of the hotel, and called for a glass of beer.

"Is there nothing about here for a man to *do*, or to see?" I inquired in a discontented tone of the landlord, who was sunning himself in the doorway.

"Oh, yes, sir!" he replied, rubbing his hands, in mild deprecation of the slur which my question cast upon Freshwave. "Surely. Have you visited Crompton Bay, sir, or Callum Bay, or Tor Bay? all spots of the greatest interest. Parties from this hotel go there daily. Some of our ladies have gone to Crompton Bay this morning, sir."

"Indeed; which of them?" I asked, pricking up my ears.

"Miss Rivers's party, sir; they started at nine o'clock, and I don't expect them home till dinner; and Mrs. Morgan's, they have gone in the opposite direction, over that way, sir," pointing with his hand to the downs which rose above the fort.

"Where is Crompton Bay?" I asked as indifferently as I could.

"It lies straight before you, sir, as you can go. You cross the downs, by that monument which was erected to celebrate the perishing of a young man at a pic-nic by walking over the cliff, for a matter of three miles, and there you are — and it's a sweet place when you've gained it; there's no end of sea-anemones and seaweed to be gathered there, if you have any taste for such curiosities, sir."

I thanked him, and said I had; and set off in the direction he had pointed out to me. Visitors to Freshwave were free to go where they listed. Neither Miss Rivers, nor the scrupulous Hardy, could say that I was following in their footsteps if I chose to make an excursion to Crompton Bay. The walk was more wild than beautiful, since it led across the downs, alternately up-hill and down-hill, until a very precipitous stony decline brought me to a part of the cliff, where a rude flight of steps was cut in the earth, to enable visitors to reach the beach. At the top of these was a gate, to which I found fastened a very small donkey attached to a very large chaise, which, I concluded, belonged to the pic-nic party. Descending the cliff, with a caution which was anything but unnecessary, I was nearly startled off my equilibrium when half-way down, by a loud shout which greeted me from the bottom.

"There's Mr. Estcourt! Isn't that jolly? Now, he'll get them for us." And as soon as I had touched the shingles, and taken off my hat to the ladies, I was seized by three little pairs of hands, and assailed by three little voices all exclaiming at once —

"There are such lovely sea-anemones there, and such lots of periwinkles: do get some for us."

It was a lonely part of the coast on which I had alighted, with nothing apparently to entitle it to admiration, except the rough boulders which lined it, and over which the waves dashed and splashed with a free and inspiriting sound, leaving little pools of salt water behind them which were famous for all the horrors dear to the collectors of marine curiosities. The little girls immediately enlisted me in their service to dive into these pools, and fill the tin pots and baskets which they had brought to carry home their treasures in.

"But I shall get my feet so wet, Georgie," I remonstrated, as one of them attempted to push me amongst the boulders.

"Take off your boots and stockings, then," said the child.

"So I will," I answered, for the alternative had not occurred to me before.

"Georgina, what *do* you mean?" exclaimed the horrified governess; "Miss Rivers, you cannot have heard your sister's proposal! Sir, I must beg of you to desist!"

"What is all the excitement about?" demanded Miss Rivers, who had wandered a little way from the spot. I was sitting on a boulder with one boot off, looking very comical, I have no doubt, in my uncertainty whether I had really consented to shock the young lady as well as the governess.

"Georgie asked me to go into the water barefooted to gather her marine treasures, Miss Rivers," I ex-

plained ruefully, "and I thought there would be no outrage in my doing so."

"Who says there will?" she demanded loftily.

"*I* do, Miss Rivers," replied Miss Hardy, trembling with excitement; "I never heard of such a thing before — a gentleman asked to expose his (here the governess swallowed vigorously) — his — *feet*, on a public beach, and before — ladies: I have been in many families before, and mixed in the very first society, and —"

"And so have I, Miss Hardy, and so has Mr. Estcourt; and I think we may trust him not to shock our delicacy. But as I am going to stroll a little way along the shore, perhaps you will prefer to come with me; and we will leave Mr. Estcourt to scandalise the children and the sea-gulls." So they walked away together, at which I was disappointed. I would rather Miss Rivers had put her veto on my troubling myself to please her little sisters, and given me an opportunity to walk with her instead. But we had a merry time of it amongst the boulders, nevertheless, until Flora tumbled off one of the stepping-stones into the water, and Louisa had to recall Miss Hardy to look after her. By the time that lady arrived, I had slipped on my socks and boots again, and not waiting to hear her lamentations over the wet child, and her declarations that the accident was just what she anticipated, walked off by myself to seek Miss Rivers. I found her in a sort of cave, made by a large fissure in the cliff, from the top of which a waterfall came trickling down, running away in a continuous stream into the sea. She was thinking so deeply as she stood there, with

clasped hands, gazing at the falling water that she did not hear my footstep until I was close beside her.

"I disturb your meditations, Miss Rivers; shall I go?"

She did not start or blush: she only said —

"Oh, no! Flora is not hurt, is she?"

"Not a bit; only wetted her shoes and stockings. But what were you thinking of so profoundly when I came upon you just now?"

"You would scarcely be interested if I were to tell you."

"But I should like to know —"

"I was thinking of the vast difference there is between men and women."

I was certainly not prepared for such an answer, and I showed my surprise in my countenance.

"I mean in the advantages they have in this world," she continued; "I often think of it: it seems to me so unfair."

"Are you, then, an advocate for woman's 'rights?' Miss Rivers?"

She turned towards me quickly.

"Oh, not at all! if you mean by 'rights' such nonsense as women having a voice in politics, or legislature, or anything which concerns ruling the nation. It is not our place, and we could no more fill it properly than men could order a household, or bring up children. I was thinking of something widely different."

"Of what then?"

"You are very pertinacious," she said, and for the first time I saw her smile, "and probably will not agree with me, when you hear my opinion. I was

thinking of the vast difference with which the same actions are judged in men and women. We are made by the same Hand: endowed with the same feelings, impulses, and affections: and yet the world judges us as if we were entirely separate creations."

"The laws of society do," I answered.

"The laws of society — yes! but who made those laws? Were they not laid down by men, for their own advantage and against ours? And yet they call us the weaker vessels, and profess to cherish and protect us!"

There was such an amount of contempt in her speech, that she made me feel quite uncomfortable: still I ventured to remark —

"I am afraid you have no great faith in men, Miss Rivers."

"As a sex — *no*," she emphatically replied.

"And yet you cannot complain that women do not command sufficient attention in England. It is just what it should be; but there is no country where ladies are treated with such respect as in ours. You must acknowledge that from entering a room first to deciding our fate in life we leave everything in your hands."

"Oh! it is not *that*," she said impetuously, "I know men are gallant enough in matters that are of no consequence: but that has nothing to do with justice. Whenever we are opposed to you in life, we go to the wall; as long as we are content to walk in the grooves you have laid down for us, you are merciful masters; but directly we step over them to imitate the license you permit yourselves, we have both sexes down upon us at once. Now, I don't want to hear any old

platitudes on the subject; we both know it is the case, and we both know it will never be altered, but *I* say it is bitterly unfair."

"But the nature of man, Miss Rivers, being so different to that of the fairer sex," I commenced; but she raised her hand.

"Did I not say that I would listen to no time-worn platitudes, Mr. Estcourt? Besides, who made our natures different? There is no controverting this fact, that men expect us to bear quietly from them what they would never bear from ourselves. But pray don't let us go further into the matter: you pressed me for the subject of my reverie, and you have it. I hear Miss Hardy making the cliffs re-echo with my name; perhaps it would be as well if we were to return to her and the children."

I followed her to where we had left the rest of the party, in silence. She had astonished me, not so much by the sentiments she had uttered as the fervour with which she had given vent to them. I had passed her over in common with dozens I had danced with, as incapable of conversing upon other than the most frivolous topics of the day; and those few sentences exchanged in the cave had transformed her in my eyes from a thoughtless girl into a thinking woman. So probably had I misjudged many before her, whose latent tastes I have never had an opportunity of unravelling.

I had fallen upon their little party in apparently the most unpremeditated manner, and therefore it seemed but natural, when they proposed making a move homewards, that I should accompany them on the road. I did, however, seize a favourable moment for saying to Miss Rivers, "Have I your permission to

walk part of the way back with you?" to which request she could but answer, "Certainly, if you like to do so," though she exhibited neither pleasure nor displeasure at my evident anxiety to continue in her company. However, we had not proceeded far before an accident occurred which rendered my presence very opportune. The precipitous decline had become a precipitous ascent, in drawing the large chaise up which the little donkey broke his traces, and as the excursionists had provided no rope in case of emergencies, the expedition was obliged to halt until, with the aid of a penknife and sundry contributions of ribbon from the ladies' dresses, I had contrived to mend the harness, and enable the donkey to start again. But luckily I broke the penknife into my finger, which excited general commiseration; for the women, however stubborn in prosperity, generally become amenable, God bless them! at the sight of a little blood; and I made the most of mine on behalf of Miss Rivers. She really turned quite pale as she bound a handkerchief tightly round my wound, which was a fleshy one, and did its duty bravely, whilst I looked up in her face and tried hard to make her eyes meet mine. We reached Freshwave at last, although the broken trace had delayed us considerably beyond the dinner hour.

Miss Hardy remarked upon this circumstance as we neared the hotel. I thought that my bleeding finger quite entitled me to a dinner with my fair friend, and threw out a broad hint to that effect.

"It is late indeed," I said; "I am afraid I shall have missed my mess."

"Oh no you won't," replied Miss Rivers, with the greatest *sang froid*, as she consulted her watch; "it

wants ten minutes to seven yet. We will not detain you longer, however, Mr. Estcourt, and are much obliged to you for your assistance. Good-evening."

And so I was dismissed without further ceremony, though I carried away her cambric handkerchief upon my hand; and I am afraid my sentimentality made the most of that circumstance during the night which succeeded my walk to Crompton Bay. For the next few days I did not see much of Miss Rivers; but like the parrot which could not speak, "I thought the more." I thought that she purposely avoided me; that I had permitted my admiration to be too evident; that I had done too much or too little; in fact, I thought a great deal more of her than was good for me. She puzzled while she pleased me. I had been used to have my advances anything but unfavourably received by the young ladies of my acquaintance. This I record with no particle of vanity, since it is probable that any young fellow with the same opportunities would have enjoyed the same success; would have found his compliments listened to with an appreciating smile; his soft nothings answered with the most becoming of blushes; and his powers of romancing rewarded by sundry flowers, gloves, and even variously-shaded locks of hair. But Miss Rivers, although as much a woman of the world as a girl of nineteen can be, and though it was evident that nothing that I said escaped her notice, appeared either to be *blasée* with small talk or to hold herself above it. Even from the few interviews I had obtained, I perceived that in this instance, at least, the bird had no intention of walking up to the muzzle of the gun; and the idea alone was sufficient to inflame my ardour. The oftener she passed me with

a simple bow, the deeper I meditated on schemes for making her speak; the less desirous she appeared for my company, the more eager I became that accident or design should again throw me in her way. At last the two combined procured me the pleasure I was longing for. In writing to my sister Beatrice I had mentioned that Miss Rivers was staying at Freshwave, and her answer contained the following sentence: "So Ada Rivers is down at Freshwave. When you next see her give her my love, and tell her to let me know when she returns to town. I suppose she has told you that Colonel Rivers has just married again. Don't mention her own mother to her because she ran away with Lord Edward Grieves twelve years ago, and was divorced. Papa knew the first Mrs. Rivers very well, and says she was a most beautiful woman; but that was when you were in your long clothes. I am glad you like your new quarters," &c., &c.

Without staying to remark the insult to my years which was conveyed in her last sentence, I hailed this letter from my sister. In the first place it gave me Miss Rivers's Christian name, which I had vainly tried to discover. For me thenceforth she possessed an individuality which she had not done before; and whatever the title by which I addressed her, I was foolish enough to think of her only by those three letters; and secondly, Beatrice's message afforded me the opportunity I had been sighing for, of calling formally upon Miss Rivers. She sat on the beach the whole forenoon; but contrary to my usual custom, I studiously avoided encountering her, and presented myself at the hotel as soon as luncheon-time was over. As I came in sight of it, I perceived Thomas Logan, with a cigar in his

mouth, leaning against the opposite palings. The whole length of the hotel opened with glass doors upon the garden, which skirted the road; and from the position he had assumed, I found that he could look straight into the sitting-room which was occupied by Miss Rivers and her sisters. After I had exchanged a curt salutation with him, I pointed out the fact.

"Those ladies must think that their proceedings possess a great interest for you, Logan."

"What ladies?" he inquired.

"Miss Rivers and Miss Hardy: you are looking in directly on their private apartments."

"Do you know them?"

"Whether I do or not makes no difference. They are staying here alone, and no gentleman would annoy them by intruding on their privacy."

"I know what a gentleman ought to do just as well as yourself," he answered, rudely.

"Well, practise what you know then," I replied as I moved towards the hotel door. I had no wish to have a downright quarrel with Thomas Logan, but I never came in contact with him without approaching it. He watched me as I entered the hotel, and afterwards, when admitted to Miss Rivers's presence, I perceived that he had not altered his position, but still lounged against the palings. The luncheon-table had just been cleared: Miss Rivers was reclining in an armchair; she rose at my entrance, flushed but serious, to greet me. If I had thought her charming in her beach attire, how much more so she seemed to me as she stood now, disencumbered of hat or mantle to conceal the outlines of her face and figure. I had met her in

ball-rooms, amidst a crowd of pretty women; her hair elaborately dressed, herself as elaborately robed; but she had never struck me then as being different to others; in fact, Ada Rivers had never appeared *beautiful* in my eyes until I saw her that afternoon in the plainest of morning dresses, and her wavy brown hair considerably tumbled from the attitude in which she had been indulging. I believe I made a very bad business of my message: I know I stammered considerably over my reason for calling on her, and was very nearly showing her Beatrice's letter, in proof of my sincerity, when I fortunately remembered that the whole sentence was not intended for her perusal. She helped me, however, gracefully out of my difficulty; thanked me for the trouble I had taken on her behalf (?), and said she would write to Lady Claremont herself as soon as the date was fixed for their return to London.

"I trust there is no chance of its being an early one, Miss Rivers," I remarked, with as much anxiety as I dared throw into my voice. We were alone at the time, the children being in another room with their governess.

"It is uncertain," she replied. "We do not expect my father home for another couple of months, and I am my own mistress until then; but whether I shall remain here or return to town must depend on circumstances."

"I hear that you are such an excellent swimmer," I remarked, "that I should imagine you would stay at the seaside as long as you could."

"Yes, I can swim very well; not better than all women should be able to do though, if our bodies were not cramped with our minds. I learned abroad. When

I lost my dear mother I was sent to school at Paris, and attended the *École de Natation* there for many years. I dare say you have heard how skilful most of the Parisian ladies are in the art."

Again I was startled by her so quietly mentioning the name of her mother; but the expression which she had used concerning her seemed to intimate that she had been brought up in the idea that she was dead. Having replied to her last remark, she asked me if I had ever been in Paris.

"Only once, with my father, Miss Rivers, and for a very few weeks; but I hope when I can get leave to make a longer stay there."

"It was my home until two years ago," she said, sadly. "I know less of my father than any of his daughters." I remarked that I supposed when the bride and bridegroom returned they would have a very gay house in London.

"I do not know," she replied. "I have seen very little of my father's new wife; but she is not much older than myself, and I dare say will like gaiety. However, it will probably make little difference to me."

I did not understand her last sentence, and therefore I tried to give a turn to the conversation by asking her whether she liked London or Paris best.

"I am scarcely in a position to judge," she answered. "I have viewed Paris only with the eyes of a child, and a child likes everything; and then all my reminiscences of London are painful ones. I was sent away as soon as I lost my mother, at seven years old; and I only returned to find the house shut up for the death of the second Mrs. Rivers, whom I had scarcely

seen; and now my father has consoled himself for the third time, so I suppose I shall be as little wanted as before."

She gave vent to a hard laugh as she spoke, which sounded bitter from her lips; and emboldened by her apparent idea of her mother's death, I ventured to say, softly —

"My father knew your mother well, Miss Rivers."

A glow overspread her face when I mentioned the fact, and her eyes beamed upon me as she turned quickly, and exclaimed —

"Did he, Mr. Estcourt; oh! where?"

I was rather beyond my depth then; but I made the most of what my sister's letter had told me.

"I am not quite certain of *when* and *where* it was that they were friends, Miss Rivers; but I know that it was the case; and he always speaks of your mother as having been a most beautiful woman."

The daughter drew one or two long breaths, and then she said with an effort —

"How I should like to know your father, Mr. Estcourt."

I was regretting I had not more to tell her; it was so pleasant to see the look of interest conveyed in her half-opened mouth, her earnest eyes, her trembling lips; but when the tears slowly rose into those eyes, and the under lip was cruelly taken prisoner of by the teeth above it, I could have cut out my tongue before I had mentioned her mother's name to her.

At this juncture the children burst into the room, clamorous to know if their sister would go on the beach with them; and when they caught sight of me, if I would be one of the party. Miss Rivers brushed

the tears quickly from her eyes, and asserted her willingness to do anything they desired; and I was, of course, only too glad to follow where she went.

"Fetch me my hat and cloak, Georgie," she said to one of the little ones, and they all three rushed pell-mell to do her bidding. As they left the room she turned towards me, hurriedly, and said, in a voice which was half entreaty and half command —

"Mr. Estcourt, you will not mention my mother's name before Miss Hardy and the children, please. She is not *dead*, you know."

The pure maiden eyes looked steadily in mine: there was no shame for her mother's disgrace in them, only a filial desire to cover that disgrace. Our looks met, and she appeared to need no other answer. She simply said "Thank you," and a silent compact was sealed between us for ever.

As the children returned with her hat and cloak, she put the one over her shoulders and the other on her head, without once consulting the glass. I could not help observing this little trait; she appeared so perfectly free from the love of admiration, or else so perfectly certain that under any circumstances she must command it. Miss Hardy joined us, and the party was complete.

"Now I am ready," said Miss Rivers, cheerfully, as she gave her hand to her youngest sister.

"And Mr. Estcourt can take your other hand," exclaimed the ingenuous child.

Miss Rivers smiled. The day before she would have frowned. With the mention of her mother's name the ice between us seemed to have been broken; with the mention of her mother's name, I fancied that she

had bestowed more confidence on me than she had on many others. But that was probably due to my conceit.

"Mr. Estcourt can take *your* other hand you mean, Flora," she replied; and so we headed the procession, with the laughing child holding fast a hand of each. As we set off I saw Thomas Logan eyeing us with a sort of sullen envy depicted on his face.

"Do you know who that young man is, Mr. Estcourt?" inquired Miss Rivers, as we walked away from the hotel.

"I know his name," I replied; "it is Logan."

"He behaves so strangely," she continued, "and has done so ever since he came here: staring in at the hotel windows, and following us when we go out walking; it is so unpleasant."

"It must be," I said, "and I will take care it is put a stop to."

"Oh, I hope you will not mention it again; I should be sorry if it led to anything disagreeable."

"Do not be afraid, Miss Rivers: the fact is, he is a sort of connection of mine, though, after what you tell me, I am almost ashamed to own it; but he shall never annoy you again."

Here she apologized for having mentioned the circumstance, and begged I would think no more of it; and to quiet her, I promised that I would not. But I registered a bad mark against Thomas Logan's name, nevertheless; and when I parted company that day with Miss Rivers, I went direct to seek him, and found him in the billiard-room of the hotel.

CHAPTER XI.

It was about five o'clock in the afternoon, that laziest hour in summer weather, when the freshness of the morning has past, and the cool of the evening has not yet begun — and the little billiard-room was full of men and tobacco smoke. The visitors to the hotel, as well as the few residents in Freshwave, including Graham, Hodson, and Aynsworth, had all congregated there, as they generally did at that time of the day, and I soon caught sight of Thomas Logan amongst the crowd. He was leaning against the opposite wall, watching the play, and as I had no desire to make a formal matter of my business with him, I did not immediately approach his side; but worked my way up gradually to where he stood. Finding, however, after the exchange of a few cursory remarks relative to the game, that our conversation was not likely to attract the attention of any one but ourselves, I broached the subject which occupied my mind.

"By the way — a word with you, Logan; you remember what I spoke to you about outside the hotel this afternoon?"

He did not answer me; but I saw by the expression of his eyes that he knew what I meant.

"I should be sorry to see anything unpleasant between us," I went on to say, carelessly; "but you must oblige me by discontinuing that practice altogether — or perhaps there may be."

"What business is it of yours?" he asked, curtly.

"I have the lady's own authority for making it my business: she has told me how extremely disagreeable your attentions are to her, and I have promised, on my part, that she shall not be annoyed by them again. She is also aware that you are a connection of mine; therefore you will perceive that I have a double reason for fulfilling my promise, the consideration of her comfort, and the credit of my family."

"You have promised more than you can perform, then," replied Logan, sulkily; "I am a free agent, and I consider that I have just as much right to smoke my cigar against those palings as any other man."

"And to follow ladies when they go out walking also," I said, looking him steadily in the face. "Let me catch you at it again, that's all."

He dashed down the lighted cigar from his mouth and trod it beneath his heel.

"And pray what is Miss Rivers to you, that you stand up as the self-constituted guardian of her privacy?"

"You'll oblige me," I returned haughtily, "by not mentioning that lady in a place like this: if you wish to speak of her by name you must come outside."

"I have as much right to mention her as you have," he replied: "she is no more to one than she is to the other: I dare say you imagine that you can have everything your own way, Estcourt; but you aren't the 'head of the family' yet, remember, nor likely to be."

As the old sore thus came to the surface, I could not help smiling. The circumstance he alluded to had happened so many years before, that I had almost

forgotten the details by which it was accompanied; but there was no mistaking the mingled feelings of spite and envy with which my cousin recalled my childish words.

"I am not," I replied, "nor do I see what difference it would make if I was. But whatever I may be, Logan, I have a resolute will, and by no means a woman's arm; and if you have not sufficient gentlemanly feeling to make you bend to the force of the one, I may have occasion to make you feel the force of the other. And that's what I don't want to come to, for the sake of my father and yours."

He made no reply to this; and really wishing to settle the affair amicably, I added, "Come, Logan, do not let us quarrel on the subject; you must have the sense to see there's no earthly use in following up a girl who doesn't want to know you; and it would be very unpleasant if the lady in question asked the landlord of the hotel to speak to you, which she will probably do if you continue to annoy her. So you had much best take my advice, and smoke your cigar opposite the window of somebody else. Shall we have a game together?"

The table was disengaged by this time, and I thought the offer would set matters straight between us. Logan complied, though sullenly, and we left our position for the centre of the room.

"Which shall it be — billiards or pyramids?"

"Pyramids." The answer came out so bearishly, that Hodson nudged my elbow, whispering, "Who's your sulky friend?" and I had difficulty in keeping my countenance.

"You're a better player than myself, Logan,

doubtless. I think you must give me a couple of balls."

"I shan't do any such thing!" he replied, in the same tone of voice; "if we play at all, we'll play even."

"All right, then — come on."

We tossed who should commence the game, and Logan won. He advanced to the table, and, after a deliberate aim, missed the lot; at which he growled, and the spectators laughed.

It was now my turn and I played a stroke for safety. My cousin took up his cue again, and with a random stroke, evidently played under the influence of anger, scattered the balls, at which he commenced to swear violently, and placed himself at a disadvantage, for I was as cool as if nothing had happened to disturb me. I was not a first-rate player, far from it; but, as luck would have it, I took on that occasion four balls running, a feat which I had very seldom accomplished before. As the last one fell into the pocket, Thomas Logan sprang forward, and exclaimed loudly —

"That's a foul stroke!"

"I'm sure it was not," I replied, firmly. "Marker, what do you say?"

"It was right enough, sir," said the marker.

"He moved the ball!" continued Logan, vehemently.

I appealed to the men surrounding the table.

"You all saw me play; did I move the ball or did I not?"

"No, no, certainly not," — "Decidedly not," — "Never saw fairer play in my life!" — "Deuced good stroke!" — and so on, were the various judgments immediately passed in my favour. I now considered

the matter settled, but Thomas Logan was of a different opinion.

"I don't care what any one of you say," he exclaimed; "I maintain that Estcourt moved the ball, and that the play was foul."

"You have the decision of twenty against one that it was not so," I replied; "the fact is, Logan, you've lost your temper, and we had better not go on with the game."

At this he became furious, and almost inulting.

"I've seen plenty of this kind of thing," he commenced, in a blustering manner. "I don't want to come to you or any one here to teach me what's fair play and what isn't. I've been accustomed to deal with gentlemen, and I'm not going to be bullied into believing a thing against the evidence of my own eyes."

"Well, believe it or not, as you choose," I answered, angrily; "I, for one, shall not give you another opportunity of exercising your powers of discrimination, and if I know my friends, I fancy you will play by yourself for the future." And accompanied by half a dozen of the principal men present, I quitted the billiard-room, leaving Mr. Thomas Logan looking particularly foolish, notwithstanding his loud boasting, and a few days afterwards I found that he had disappeared from Freshwave. This I was not surprised at, as he received so cool a reception in the billiard-room after the scene which I have described, that a less sensitive person than himself would scarcely have cared to encounter it a second time. I wrote the whole account of this affair (with the exception of that part which referred to Miss Rivers) to my father, and had the

satisfaction of finding, that instead of blaming, he laughed heartily at the share I had taken in the transaction.

In the meanwhile, as far as I dared, I was imitating the movements of Miss Rivers' shadow. Every morning it so fell, that without any collusion on her part I found myself on the beach at the same time as she did; and on many an evening when she had wandered away from Freshwave Gate, with her little sisters and their governess, my feet appeared instinctively to take the same road, so that it was the most natural thing in the world that we should return home through the open corn-fields or the shady lanes together.

I absolve her, at this juncture or any other, from giving me the least particle of encouragement. The blame of our meetings, if blame there was, rested entirely on my own shoulders; for the consequences I had to thank no one but myself. She gave me many a hint to leave her, but I was fast progressing towards that stage of interest when the broadest hint, which is intended to warn a man off a woman, is lost. I liked the morning interviews which I obtained with her better than the evening; when she would sit on the shingles, after she had left her bathing-machine, engaged in reading, and I with ready assurance would throw myself on the beach beside her. I fancied I read more of her real mind at those times than at any other. It was so easy to lead the conversation to the book she held in her hand, and thence to topics connected with its subject. Our talk was always of such abstract matters; we never touched upon individualism, or if I was bold enough to approach it I observed that she invariably changed the theme. One day, upon seeking

her side, I found her sitting in her usual place, with her brows knitted, the "Times" newspaper crushed in her hand, and an expression of pain on her features as if she was passing through some personal conflict. At first I feared that she had received bad news, and expressed a hope to the contrary.

"Oh, no!" she replied, roused from her reverie by the interruption of my presence, "I have only been reading the details of the Whitechapel murder. What a miserable world this is!"

The case she alluded to was a very painful one, at that time attracting general attention. The murderess was a poor girl, who had been driven by jealousy to kill her betrayer and her child and attempt her own life; and as she belonged to the better class of tradespeople the deed had excited as much interest as if it had occurred in a higher station.

"They are very shocking," I replied, "and scarcely fit reading for tender nerves; you should turn to something pleasanter, Miss Rivers."

"What a woman has *felt* I suppose a woman may read about," she answered (she was always ready to take up the cudgels in defence of her mental courage); "and only fancy what that poor creature *must* have felt; what she must have gone through before she became insane enough to take the life of her baby. I have been picturing her silent, desolate, prolonged agony to myself, until I can hardly wonder at the deed which followed it."

Her eyes had dilated with feeling as she proceeded, and her hands had tightly clasped themselves together around her knees.

"You have more sympathy with her, Miss Rivers,"

I said inquiringly, "in murdering the child than the father?"

"Much more," she answered quickly. "A mother must die a double death who kills her child before she kills herself."

"And yet there are women who do the one, without intending or thinking of the other."

"But not *mothers*," she replied; "they do not deserve the name; the only excuse a woman *can* have for destroying her child is when she has not the heart to leave it in this bitter world alone."

"You are too sensitive, Miss Rivers — too imaginative: you should not permit your mind to dwell upon such horrible subjects."

"Ah! so Miss Hardy says: she considers newspapers very indelicate for ladies to read: and it is no use my reminding her that we live in an indelicate world. She only replies, 'So much the worse, my dear Miss Rivers, but a gentlewoman should keep her eyes closed.' But unfortunately I was born with mine wide open, and neither heart nor eyes will shut! Oh! what fools we women are! what *utter*, *utter* fools!"

There was so truthful a ring in the tone in which she said the words, the depth of conviction they carried to her was evidently so great, the sigh by which they were accompanied so genuine, that I could only wonder at this exhibition of heart in a woman who had been alternately reared in a Parisian *pensionnat* and a motherless home. No one who heard Miss Rivers thus speak could doubt for a moment that she uttered simply what she felt; for the whole of her behaviour showed how indifferent she was to the admiration of the crowd, and

how little she did to attract it. Her very nonchalance, however, was drawing my feet daily deeper into the net from which I should find it so difficult to extricate them: and regardless of the incessant inquiries, jests, and insinuations from my brother officers which I was condemned to hear, I steadily pursued the same course of action, until more than a month had elapsed since I arrived at Freshwave; and every one there but myself knew that I was at the feet of Ada Rivers. My own eyes were opened to the fact in a very sudden manner. I suppose the day of reckoning in such cases usually falls abruptly: we come down to dinner, thinking Miss Jones a very charming young lady, as we have thought for weeks beforehand; but she chooses on this occasion to turn her attention from ourselves and fix it upon Smith; and in a moment the pang of jealousy we feel reveals to us, while it draws all taste out of the *salmi* on our plate, that Miss Jones is the particular woman we desire to secure altogether for ourselves. I had no rival with Miss Rivers through jealousy of whom to read my own heart, and the feeling by which I discovered that she possessed more than an ordinary interest for me was that of fear. One evening we were on the downs together. I had seen her set off from the fort, and having nearly choked myself in my efforts to swallow my dinner, hastened to join her. For a wonder she was alone; a most unusual circumstance since I had taken upon myself to dog her footsteps, and one which I hailed with delight. The short, soft turf of the downs prevented Miss Rivers hearing that she was followed, and I was close behind her without her being aware of my vicinity. She was strolling slowly along the cliff, which was perfectly unprotected and frightfully pre-

cipitous; and as I gained upon her, I observed to my horror that, wrapt in thought, she walked from one side to the other, and that at each turn she went nearer and nearer to the edge. The idea that she might fall over and be dashed to pieces on the beach beneath, suddenly struck me; a picture of her fair body, crushed and mutilated on the cruel shingles, rose up in my imagination, and froze my blood, and as her figure commenced again to sway towards the point of danger, I rushed forward, and at the risk of falling over myself, sprang between her and the outer edge. My feet were just planted in the crumbling soil, and with an effort to save myself, I extended my arms towards her, gave her a push on to the downs, and then followed and stared at her. Her face had flushed with surprise, whilst mine I felt was as pale as ashes.

"Mr. Estcourt!" she exclaimed, as if she thought I was drunk or mad.

At first I could not speak to her: I drew my breath hardly for a few moments, and then I said, panting: —

"I thought you were going over the cliff!"

When the reaction had set in, I trembled all over; and the deep fear and anxiety I had felt must have been depicted on my countenance. Something else, which I felt still, was depicting itself on my heart. I knew that I loved her. I knew that if Ada Rivers had gone over that precipice that I should have gone after her, although certain death awaited me at the bottom. But she saw nothing of this.

"Was there any danger?" she asked quietly.

I had partly recovered myself by that time, and I explained to her how great the danger had been, and

how much nearer she had walked to the edge than she had imagined. I led her there again, and bade her look over the cliff, at the frightful depth beneath it, until she shuddered and drew back, and made more of the service I had rendered her than it really was worth. And we walked home through the silent evening together; and although our conversation was on the most ordinary topics, there was a continual song kept up in my heart, the notes of which rose above even the music of her voice, and told me that I loved her.

When I went to bed that night, I conned over earnestly the new knowledge which I had attained, in order to arrive at some resolution with respect to my future actions. Although I was young, I was no boy except in years; and I had not thought long before I decided, that whether she loved me or not in return, I should tell Ada Rivers of my discovery. I felt that without it I could no more mix in her society with the same freedom as heretofore: added to which, she might leave Freshwave shortly, and I had not the "faint heart" which would lose a "fair lady" for want of asking. If she accepted me, of course marriage would be the result, Here I hesitated, not being quite sure how my father would receive the proposal of my "settling" at twenty years of age; but came to the conclusion, a moment afterwards, that whether he liked it or no, I should be my own master in another year; and Ada Rivers would doubtless wait for me. If I had not sufficient bashfulness in prosecuting my first suit, I had plenty of energy: and I have made it a point through life to let the women decide which they like best in a lover. It is a matter which so purely concerns themselves alone. Having arrived at this decision,

however, I was compelled to wait for a favourable moment in which to tell my tale; for I was too romantic to make a formal declaration of my attachment, and trusted much to time, place, and opportunity to insure me the flattering answer I hoped for. I looked upon women in those days as very weak creatures, compared to myself, and had great faith in their being coaxed or cajoled into changing even an expressed opinion; had faith also in the supposition that the mere fact of their knowing that a man entertained a passion for them, was sufficient to make them look with a kindly eye upon him. So I followed Ada Rivers about wherever she went, in hopes of finding her once more alone; looking on her almost as mine already — or to be mine as soon as the magic words were spoken between us. Her sisters, however, or the governess were always in the way, until I began to hate the very sight of them. At last, however, I imagined I had gained the opportunity I sought. A few evenings after the adventure on the cliff, I was lying on the downs above the fort smoking a cigar before mess, and dreaming of my love, when the sound of children's voices in distress reached me from below. Immediately beneath the cliff at that part was a large cave, which at low water was accessible from the beach, and which was divided into several chambers. The tide was now setting in, though slowly, and I guessed directly that some little people, probably fishermen's children, had been taken prisoners there, and would not be released without a good wetting. But in another minute the voices had risen louder, and I recognized those of Flora and Georgie and Louie Rivers.

"What *shall* we do, Georgie? it's right above my stockings; she'll be *so* angry."

"Oh! I wish somebody was here to carry us over it: I shall have another page of 'Guide to Knowledge' to-morrow; she said I should if I wetted my new boots."

"Can't we go now, Louie? the waves have gone back a little."

"Let's try — make haste — no! here it comes again; and such a big one! Oh! Georgie, we shall be drowned. Do call out loud, so that Ada may hear us."

I felt no doubt now of what children were in the predicament alluded to, and running down to the beach, I stepped across to the cave and carried the three little miscreants to dry land again, where they were all gratitude for the trouble I had taken.

Miss Hardy had gone into Starmouth by the coach to buy them some new copybooks, and Ada had a headache, and so they had been allowed to play on the beach by themselves; and had found such lots of periwinkles in the cave, and it had been such fun, jumping from one big stone to another, that they had forgotten all about the tide, until they thought it was time to go home. And they were so much obliged to me, and would I kiss them all round, before Miss Hardy came back, and please what o'clock was it, and had the coach returned from Starmouth?

The mess bugle had sounded some little time before, but I could not resist the temptation of taking the children back to their sister. She was sitting in the room with the cloth laid for dinner, looking a little pale perhaps for her headache, but none the less attractive in my eyes; and she was almost as full of

thanks as the children themselves for what I had done for them.

"You have saved them probably from a day's punishment, Mr. Estcourt; for they are most judiciously brought up, and receive as severe a reprimand for wetting their feet as they would for telling a falsehood. I am sure they ought to be greatly obliged to you, for I expect Miss Hardy back every minute."

And indeed as she spoke, the horn sounded, and the wheels of the approaching coach were to be distinctly heard.

"And Mr. Estcourt has missed his dinner too," put in Georgie, "for I heard the second bugle when we were in the cave."

Grown wiser by experience, I said that it was no matter, and that I should be in time for as much dinner as I cared to have. But Miss Rivers asked me if I would stay to theirs.

"If you can put up with a family dinner, Mr. Estcourt, we shall be very pleased to see you."

Of course I said, and I meant what I said, that any dinner would be acceptable to me at which I had the pleasure of her society. In another minute, Miss Hardy was in the room, with a pile of copybooks under her arm, not looking particularly gracious at finding an addition to the party.

"And are we not to have dinner, my dear Miss Rivers?" she inquired, pathetically, after she had detailed the interesting particulars of her journey to Starmouth.

"Certainly," was the reply. "Mr. Estcourt stays with us this evening;" and the bell which the governess rang after the announcement was pulled so violently

that it sounded as sharp as her own voice. Considering, I suppose, that increased danger called for increased care, she was especially vigilant over her unhappy little pupils during the meal which followed; and snapped them up so quickly at the least solecism of good manners that they were almost afraid to ask for as much as they wanted. Dinner ended, she marched her trio to another room to undergo some mental exercises before they went to bed. It was now eight o'clock; the sun had long gone down, but the August night was close and oppressive, and the little room felt still more so.

"How pleasant and cool it is out here," exclaimed Miss Rivers, stepping from the open glass doors into the hotel garden. "I have had such a wretched headache from the heat all day; the air is quite refreshing to me."

I followed her of course. The garden of the hotel was merely a belt of grass, intersected with gravel paths, for it was too near the sea to permit any flowers to flourish there. At the end was planted a low hedge, beyond which lay the shingles, and the broad, smooth sheet of water looking like colourless glass beneath the twilight.

"How calm the sea is!" said Miss Rivers, as she stood by the low hedge and I stood beside her. "Will it not look beautiful when the moon rises? Have you seen the natural arch by moonlight, Mr. Estcourt?"

I had not; which was the less surprising as the day had generally dawned before I found my way back from the stifling little billiard-room, reeking with gas and bad air, to my quiet quarters at the fort.

"It looks so lovely," she continued. "I stayed up one night on purpose to go and see it, and I walked down there at twelve o'clock all by myself. Miss Hardy was horrified; but she would not go with me, and I met no one. It was well worth the trouble."

"I should like to have seen it," I replied, mechanically. I was gazing at her form as she stood there in the fast-increasing dusk, and thinking whether I should take her in my arms and tell her that I loved her.

"Well, it is to be seen any night, you know, only you should go when there is a full moon. You can have no idea of the effect. The moonlight makes the irregular surface of the rocks shine like crystals, and the waves — Ah!"

Unable to restrain myself any longer, I had put my arm around her waist. It was a modest, faltering touch, notwithstanding my boasted courage; but she shook herself free of it at once.

"Mr. Estcourt, you forget yourself!"

"Ada, don't be angry with me; you must know, you must have seen how I love you. I have been waiting for days for an opportunity to tell you so; only put me out of my suspense at once, and let me know my fate."

"Your fate!" she repeated, as if she scarcely understood my meaning: and as we looked at each other, I could see, notwithstanding the twilight, that her face had grown deadly pale. "Mr. Estcourt, tell me, have I done anything to warrant your putting it in my hands?"

"No! no!" I said, passionately, "a thousand times

No; only for God's sake relieve my anxiety, and say if you love me in return."

She turned her face away from me.

"Oh! I wish I had never come here! I wish we had never met!" and then, as with a sudden resolve — "Mr. Estcourt, it is not my fault, but I am *engaged to be married!*"

If she had cast a thunderbolt at my feet, she could not have surprised or disappointed me more. I could not speak to her again; I left her side, and with vehement steps strode from the little garden. I heard her voice call my name twice, but I would not stop to listen to her words; I went straight to my own room in the barracks, locked the door, threw myself on the bed, and indulged my first grief to the utmost.

CHAPTER XII.

I WAS bitterly disappointed; I hardly knew how bitterly until I came to commune with my own heart: to remember that it was all over: that I had put the question which had been hovering on my lips for so many days, and received the answer: that I had thrown the dice and they had turned up aces. Not, that with all my assurance I had been conceited enough never to imagine a reverse side to the picture; on the contrary I had often thought on my possible defeat; but I had not dreamed of its coming to me in this particular form, and felt aggrieved to be vanquished in any but my own way. I had fancied Miss Rivers objecting to my suit on various scores; because we knew too little of each other, or that as yet, she felt nothing but friendship for me, or that she feared the opposition of her father to the engagement; but on none which should not prove a fresh impetus to me to make the citadel surrender by force. Under such circumstances, however disheartened, I should still have retained hope, and taken comfort in the thought that time, or perseverance, or a resolute will, must eventually accomplish my object. But the news which I had received in the hotel garden left me no grounds for anything but the attempt to sweep her image from my heart at once and for ever. At first, I was disposed to blame her that she had left me so long in ignorance of the fact of her engagement; but the thought was too

ungenerous even for a rejected lover to harbour. I knew that she was entirely innocent of leading me into the error of supposing that she was free: that never by word or look had she hinted that my attentions were agreeable to her; that we were not even sufficiently intimate to justify my expecting to have been enlightened regarding her private affairs; and that whenever we approached the subject of herself, she had, as I have said before, studiously turned the conversation. She had behaved to me consistently throughout the term of our acquaintance; she had been always courteous, but modest; friendly, but reserved; and I could not deny that from the first I had known there was a line drawn between us, over which a more daring man than myself would scarcely have presumed to venture. I was thus perfectly aware that my disappointment was due to my own folly, and that I fully deserved it for having been so rash as to disclose my love to Miss Rivers, without having ascertained, by however slight a sign, that she knew of my attachment, and did not disapprove of it. But the pain we inflict on ourselves is no easier to bear than that which comes from the malice of others; in fact it is harder, since we are deprived of even the consolation of reviling our enemies. It appeared to me, on looking back, that notwithstanding I had admitted the possibility of a refusal from her, my mind had far oftener dwelt on the happiness I should feel when she accepted me. I fancy I had seen her fair face glowing at the announcement of my love; her eyes beaming with reciprocal affection; had felt the fluttering of her heart pressed against mine; the trembling of the hand I held in my own. I had anticipated such a scene and felt it would be the acme of pleasure for

me; now, as I recalled my fancies, and knew that they could never be fulfilled; that the dream was over, and all that remained for me to do was to forget it, I ground my teeth together, and would have risked my salvation to obtain what in my boastful folly I had so lightly dreamt of. For I never knew how much I loved Ada Rivers until I heard that I had no right to do so; that all the time I had been following her about in public, and sighing after her in private, her thoughts and heart had been occupied with the image of the absent; that it was of no use my attempting to gain her favour or to change her opinions, because she was already pledged to become the wife of another man. That night was one of the most miserable I have ever passed. Let no one decry the suffering of the young because they are young. As we grow older we get used to pain, both mental and physical. I was all unused to both; and the first agony I endured was in proportion to my strength. It was no flesh wound, for it left its mark for many a day afterwards. My love for Ada Rivers was my tide; but I missed it in the flood. Had it so happened that she had been free to return my affection, the whole current of my life would probably have been changed. I should have glided from a loyal engagement into a loyal marriage, and temptations which have been my curse would have lost their power over me. As it was, I trust that such as read my history, whilst they shake their heads over the follies with which my existence has been crowded, will remember the disappointment which sunk so deeply into my heart; sunk like a stone to the very bottom, and there remained, a heavy weight, unknown to all but myself.

One night was all the holiday which I allowed my sorrow; with the morning's light I was up again, to my brother officers apparently the same as ever; but I carefully avoided leaving the vicinity of the fort, and pleaded the unusual heat as an excuse for indolence. In the afternoon Hodson came up from the billiard-room brimful of news.

"I say, Estcourt, do you know that your friends the Rivers' are off to-day?"

The mention of her name, and the sudden intelligence of her departure, made my heart leap; but I replied steadily that I had been told some time before that they were likely to leave.

"Well, the place *is* getting confoundedly hot; it's the same all over the Isle of Wight; I wish to goodness we were out of it. I suppose you'll be running down to the hotel; they are putting the luggage on the fly now."

"No, I think not. I dined with them last night, and made my *adieux* then; and the weather is really too warm for any unnecessary gallantry."

"Lazy dog," laughed Hodson. "I wish I'd your chance of being polite; I'd accompany her to Starmouth, and see her off by the boat. There won't be a woman worth looking at in Freshwave when she's gone."

I fully acquiesced in his opinion; but I had not the courage to go and say good-bye to her. She had no wish to meet me again, or why this sudden departure? She intended me, doubtless, to take it as a hint to that effect, and she would find her desire was respected. Notwithstanding, I took my glasses up to the heights, and watched the carriages as they moved off from the hotel. There appeared no limit to the

luggage; it was evidently a final move, and this was the final look I was about to give her. I could discern her figure plainly as she stepped into the vehicle: it appeared just the same as usual; but as the fly moved off, she turned her face towards the fort and full upon my glasses. For a moment there flashed upon me a pair of serious, anxious-looking eyes, and then she was gone, and I had seen the last of her. I turned my face round upon the thyme-scented grass, and thought of her own words, "What a miserable world this is!"

I passed through the next few days in much the same manner as one does through those which immediately succeed a funeral. I ate my meals, performed my duty, appeared at the billiard table, and rose and went to bed as I had done before; but I felt so little interest in anything that I began to think that to all intents and purposes life was over for me. On the fourth day, however, the reception of a letter in Miss Rivers's handwriting caused a complete revolution to take place in my feelings. I had never seen her writing before; but directly I took the envelope in my hands, I felt instinctively that it had come from hers, and mine shook so violently that I could scarcely open it. The letter was written upon foreign paper, at the top of which was printed a scroll with the motto, "*Aide toi; le ciel t'aidera*," and as I read I felt that she had selected it for my especial benefit. She dated from Ryde, and wrote as follows: —

"My dear Mr. Estcourt,

"I hardly know if I am wise in writing to you; but I am sure that you will not misinterpret my reason for doing so, and I have so great a desire to tell you,

what you would not wait the other evening to hear, that I feel as honoured by your preference as if I had been at liberty to consider your proposal. I trust you absolve me from all blame in the matter, and will believe me when I say that had I entertained the least idea in what our unfortunate acquaintance would have resulted, I would have left Freshwave long ago; but your revelation took me completely by surprise. I hope I have your forgiveness for any pain I have thus unintentionally caused you, and that it may prove as short-lived as the pleasure. If you will not be offended at my presuming to offer you advice on the subject, mine is that you turn your mind for the next few months to some active employment. I do not think so lightly of what you told me as to imagine you will all at once forget your disappointment; but the sooner you conquer your feelings for me, the sooner I shall pardon myself for having been the cause of them.

"Please don't answer this letter, it will be best for both of us.

"Believe me, your sincere friend,

"ADA RIVERS."

The perusal of this note threw me into a transport of hope and happiness. I fancied I could read love for myself, disguised beneath the words of pity, and the expression "*it will be best for both of us*," led me into the mistake of imagining that Ada Rivers feared for her own peace of mind as well as for mine. Thereupon I determined to disregard her wishes, and to answer her letter; it was a selfish resolution, but men in love are not usually remarkable for the opposite feeling. I composed a passionate epistle, the details of

which I have forgotten; but which, doubtless, contained more folly than I should care to write down here. I remember that in it I poured out my whole heart before her; that I declared my love to be stronger and more capable of making her happiness than the love of any other man could be; and expressed my readiness, if she but acquiesced, to fight for her possession against the whole world. A fiery, boyish epistle, of the composition of which I might now be ashamed; but dictated by feelings so fresh and ardent that a careworn man of the world would give his right hand to be able to feel them again. I sent my letter to Ryde as soon as it was finished, and waited anxiously for a reply, but none came. Day after day I lay in wait for the postman on his road from Starmouth, but he never brought me an answer from Miss Rivers, until I grew sick with disappointment, and cursed my lot, and was almost ready to curse her, and all women for her sake. I can see now how mad I was to send that letter, how more than mad to expect her to reply to it; but then I was young and inexperienced and unreasonable; and not having been able to take her communication in the kindly, unaffected spirit it was written, grew incensed with her for not making a bad matter worse by opening a correspondence with me. I had almost fretted myself ill with my fruitless longing and expectation, when a letter from my father suddenly took me to town. Two circumstances had occurred to call for my presence there; one of which was a violent attack of gout on his own part; the other, the return of my sister Emmeline and her husband from Canada. It was the best thing that could have happened to me: in a moment I had shaken off the apathy and discontent

which were beginning to be my masters, and was all eagerness to rejoin my family; and having procured, without any difficulty, a week's leave of absence, I left Freshwave, and thought, as I lost sight of the quiet little place, that a week of pleasure in town would be certain to act as a restorative to my usual cheerfulness. The idea was a natural sequence to the first excitement consequent on an unpremeditated change of scene and action. I had not lived much longer before I learned that a real heart-wound may be salved over, but is not to be healed in so many days, months, or even years. The same evening I was in Brook Street. I found my father really ill, and looking more so than I had ever seen him. He had been kept to the house with gout for upwards of three weeks, and the confinement, to a man of his active habits, was almost worse to bear than the pain. He had sunk into low spirits during the last few days, and had several times expressed a wish that I had never left Woolwich until his daughter had begged him to write for me. The unexpected arrival of Emmeline and her husband (who was now Colonel Talbot) had decided him to take their advice, and so we four (whom my father was used to call *his* children) were once more reunited. Emmeline we all thought much changed. Her Canadian life did not appear to have agreed with her, for she was thin and pale, and a great contrast to her blooming sisters; but she had the same sweet smile as ever, and glided so quietly into her place as her father's nurse and companion that one might have thought she had never left it. My old friend and brother-in-law, Colonel Talbot, with the exception of a few grey hairs, looked as well as ever; but he stared with amazement

when I entered the room, as if he had expected to see me the same size as I had been when he left England. Their family consisted of only one child, a daughter, five years old, of whom they appeared inordinately fond, which called down much matronly advice from Beatrice.

"Ah! it's all very well for you, my dear," Emmeline would say, in extenuation of her idolatry of little Ethel; "when I have ten children perhaps I shall not have so much love to bestow on one;" and poor Beatrice, who had really been guilty of eight babies, would half laugh, and wholly blush, and declare it was very unfair to take to enumeration.

"By-the-by, Gerald, did you ever give my message to Miss Rivers?" she exclaimed one evening, as we were all assembled round the dinner-table in Brook Street.

I felt that I coloured as she put the question to me, but I answered in the affirmative, and no one appeared to perceive my discomfort.

"Have they left Freshwave?"

"Yes; some little while ago."

"Where are they now?"

Here I must confess that I told a downright falsehood, and said I had no idea.

"Oh, well, I suppose Colonel and Mrs. Rivers will be back in town shortly, and then their daughters will join them. She's a pretty girl, isn't she?"

"Which one?" I spoke as innocently as I could, tossing off a glass of wine as I spoke.

"Which one? why Ada, of course: the others are all children in the schoolroom. You must have met Ada at my house, last season, Gerald."

"I believe I did; but I do not make a library of my engagement cards, and so the name had escaped me, until I heard it again. *En passant*, what has become of the lovely Miss Harris, with whom I danced so often this year?"

"Oh! Lucy Harris. I believe she's gone for a tour in Germany. Yes, she is a *very* pretty girl; I can assure you, Emmy, Gerald was constant to her this season for a whole fortnight; I really thought it was going to be a case. He danced with nobody else when he could dance with her; called at my house twice a week in hopes of meeting her; and lost his appetite completely for dinner, one day, when he had just come from Mrs. Holmes's kettle-drum, where he had been discussing coffee and ices and Italian confectionery all the afternoon."

My sisters laughed heartily at this description of the fatal effect love had had upon me; whilst I declared it was too bad of Beatrice to lay my heart bare in that fashion, and my father said he hoped it would be the only kind of love-making that I should indulge in for some time to come.

"Gerald is a great deal too young to think of anything serious yet: I have no faith in the happiness of early marriages, usually the results of an immatured choice. In my opinion, a man should see all kinds of women before he decides upon one, and the only way he can see them is to flirt with them. Depend upon it, Gerald will never choose for a wife, at thirty, the girl he has madly admired at twenty."

I differed from my father here, of course; but equally, of course, I was silent, and he went on —

"Now! there was the mother of the girl you men-

tioned a short time ago, Colonel Rivers's first wife: she was a beautiful woman; fair as any Saxon, with hair and eyes as dark as an Italian's; her daughter can't hold a candle to her. I was desperately gone about her before she married Rivers; ay, and for the matter of that, so was some one else, not distantly related to me. However, she would have nothing to say to either of us, and she hadn't been married seven years before she eloped with that scoundrel, Grieves, and there was an end of her; and don't you think I was devilish thankful when I heard it, that she had refused to do me the honour to become my wife? Depend on it, a man under thirty is not capable of judging what he likes and what he doesn't like: we begin by thinking women are the softest, easiest books possible to read, and we end by knowing they are the most confoundedly hard riddles a man ever set himself to unravel."

Here my father pushed his wine glass impatiently from him, for he was able to have his chair wheeled up to the dinner-table, and looked disgusted with the recollections his theme had evoked. I could not perceive in what way the results of his own matured choice carried out his theory, but I remarked that perhaps had Mrs. Rivers become Mrs. Estcourt she might never have run away at all.

"Oh, yes she would," he answered decidedly, "that is, if Grieves has come across her; for he was the most fascinating man of his day, and used to boast that no woman could withstand him. Fine fellow, Grieves."

"I thought you called him a 'scoundrel' just now, papa!" observed Beatrice.

"Well! so he was, my dear," said the moralist,

rather confused, "as far as carrying off poor Mrs. Rivers was concerned; for she was an uncommonly pretty woman; but still, we must give the devil his due, you know."

"I'm afraid if Lord Edward Grieves only got what I should consider his due," replied my sister, "that his allowance would be small; I met him once at a dinner party, and I thought him a horrid-looking old man; greedy, selfish, and affected, and cannot imagine his ever having been fascinating."

"Does Mrs. Rivers live with him still?" I asked, appealing to my father.

"I should imagine not; but I know nothing about it: I am not even aware if she is alive: it all happened so many years ago. But the girl can't hold a candle to her mother; not a candle."

So, I had little doubt, had many a man argued with reference to the mother herself. We are so apt to think that nothing is so good as it was when we were young: so hard to convince that it is our own aptitude for appreciation that has dulled, and not the articles we are called upon to value.

I spent my week in town, and then I returned to my duty. It had been a week of excitement, but not of happiness; on the whole, however, I had enjoyed myself. I left my father better, and the Talbots settled down in Brook Street to keep him company: so that I was quite easy on his account. The first question I put to my servant on my return to Freshwave, was relative to my letters. Several had arrived during my absence, but none from Ryde. A deep, dull feeling seemed again to settle on my spirits, and I was forced to acknowledge to myself that I had been fool enough

to cherish expectation in spite of my experience. The fear, however, of my brother officers perceiving my dejection, and guessing the cause, aided me in throwing it off. I had not destroyed the letter I had received from Miss Rivers; in default of another, I returned to it for comfort. The little diversion consequent on my journey to town, had done me service: I was enabled now to read it with different eyes, and to see how futile had been my hopes, after the reception of such a letter, of beguiling her into substituting a reciprocity of love, for pity for the distress she had caused me.

I pondered long on the advice which she had given; it tallied with my father's injunctions to me on leaving him for Freshwave, and which he had renewed during my last visit. I determined that I would follow her counsel and his, and seek active employment for my mind, which I could do only by attempting literary labour. I was forbidden to write to her; I would tell her all my thoughts and hopes and aspirations: she should see how I regarded her — in print.

Once seized with this idea, I soon went to work. I pictured to myself, not scenes which had, but which might have been, had fate not interposed between herself and me. I drew a woman, not Miss Rivers, but something like her; and a man, not Gerald Estcourt, but something like him, and put all her beauties on my heroine's head, and all my passion in my hero's mouth; and doing this, the place and time, and mode of action followed naturally. I wrote from the bottom of my heart: freshly, sincerely, and unaffectedly; and my tale, with all its faults, was consequently true to nature, and grew with rapidity. I had commenced it with a view to its completion in a few chapters; but

before I knew where I was, it had refused to be finished under three volumes. The work was good for me; it occupied my thoughts even when I was not engaged upon it, and prevented my dwelling upon my disappointment; and gradually, the morbid feelings which I had not only possessed, but nurtured for some time after the termination of my unfortunate attachment, disappeared: a healthier tone of mind set in; and if not as lighthearted as I had been before I saw Miss Rivers, I was at least myself again. I was terribly thrown back at one period of my convalescence by an announcement to the following effect, which appeared in the daily papers.

"On the 15th inst., at the church of St. George's, Hanover Square, by the Rev. —, assisted by the Rev. —, Saville Penryhn, Esq., son of the late Saville Penryhn, Esq., of Mostyn, in the county of Glamorganshire, to Ada, eldest daughter of Colonel Frederick Rivers, of H.M. 50th Regiment of Royal Buffs."

Before I read that announcement, I had thought that my transient dream could not be ended more effectually than it was; but, the final shock over, I staggered to my feet again and went on my way steadily. The name of Ada Rivers could never again disturb me; there was no such person now — she was Ada Penryhn. I turned to my literary work with more zest than before, ostensibly, because I reasoned with myself that occupation was necessary for me; really because I took a melancholy delight in lingering over the pages which teemed with traits of the character which had unfolded itself to me in the sequestered spot I wrote from. I believe I was as cheerful a companion during that time, as ready to engage in any fun, or to

laugh at any jest, as I had ever been; and if I was not heart-whole it is certain that I showed no outward signs of my complaint. In the meanwhile, with the occasional distraction of a flying visit to London, nearly twelve months had slipped away since I first arrived in Freshwave, when a great and startling change was made in my prospects.

CHAPTER XIII.

I WAS fast nearing the time when I should come of age, when I perceived a palpable alteration in the tone of my father's letters. He had always been a particularly cheerful writer, and whatever his private sufferings, and during the past twelvemonth I knew they had been great, he was noted for keeping them to himself, especially on paper. I could not, therefore, read the complaints with which his communications were now filled without feeling considerable apprehension on his account; and the thought of his illness often came between me and the business I had in hand. He had been in the habit for years past of experiencing occasional attacks of gout, which had never failed, however, to yield to medical treatment, and a reasonable amount of time and quiet living; for my father had led what is called a hard life, and undermined his constitution in more ways than one. Latterly, his disease appeared to have become more obstinate and difficult of management; and although he had the best advice in London the enemy retained possession of the capital, and refused to surrender. My father's previous attacks had never been so great as to prevent his being able, with help, to hobble from room to room, or to be wheeled or carried about the house in a chair made for the purpose; thus, even in the midst of pain, he had been able to divert his mind and carry on his business, by seeing his friends and those with whom

he had to do. Now, however, he had been for some weeks completely confined to one room, and his letters, from being originally disposed to make the best of a bad job, became first regretful, next fretfully complaining, and then despondent, until this state of mind, so new to him, culminated in the following epistle, for the receipt of which I was almost prepared: —

"My dear Gerald,

"You *must* come to me. I can't bear it alone any longer. I've been shut up in this room for a month to-morrow, and there is not the least alteration in my symptoms, nor likely to be, as far as I can make out from the doctors' shuffling statements. The Talbots are in Scotland with some of his people; but if they were here I should want you all the same. Get leave as soon as you can; not for a week, that's worse than none at all — I miss you so dreadfully when you go again — but for as long a spell as they'll give you. If you can manage this, we'll spend the autumn at Grasslands, and perhaps the country air will set me up again.

"Your affectionate father,

"P. Estcourt."

As soon as I had read this letter I applied for three months' leave, which I had no difficulty in procuring, as I had never taken more than a few days at a time since joining the battery, and directly I received the order I went to my father in London. I had expected to find him, like most gouty patients, very irritable and fractious, perhaps hard to bear with, and difficult to manage; but I was not prepared to see him

so broken in spirits, and subdued by continuous pain, that his fine firm character seemed to be lost in the querulous complaints of an invalid. When I first entered his room he was sitting in an arm-chair, his foot, which had attained a frightful size, supported on a rest before him; and as I approached his side, he thrust out his hand to seize mine, attempted to mutter some expression of his delight at meeting me again, but broke down instead, and actually shed tears. If I had witnessed the equestrian statue of the Duke of Wellington mopping its face with a pocket handkerchief, I could scarcely have been more surprised.

"Good God, sir!" I exclaimed, "why did you not inform me before of the state to which you have been reduced? I could have come three months ago as well as now; and you might have been saved much of the confounded *ennui* from which you have evidently suffered."

My poor father looked thoroughly ashamed of his weakness, as he passed the back of his hand across his eyes; but with the usual fearlessness of his character where another man's opinion was concerned, he had no hesitation in confessing the cause of his emotion.

"You mustn't think less of your old father, Gerald, for being too glad to see you. The fact is, boy, you're the dearest object in the world to me. A woman may or may not have had the power before now to draw tears from my eyes: but I'll guarantee that you are the first man who has done so. I really have been longing to see your ugly face. And I've had a deuced lot of pain to bear since I saw it last, I can tell you."

After my arrival, however, my father rapidly improved in spirits, if not in health. He became quite

cheerful again, and some of the pleasantest if not the liveliest hours which I spent, were passed in his bedroom. His great desire was to go to Grasslands; and as soon as he could bear the motion and fatigue of the journey I took him down into Dorsetshire. We had not inhabited the place for years, although we generally spent part of each shooting season there; but it had been left in charge of careful hands, and everything was in readiness for our reception. My father's principal medical adviser in London, a physician of high standing, had agreed to visit him twice a week at Grasslands, and for some days after we arrived there I was too much occupied with carrying out his injunctions to think of anything else.

At the end of that time, however, my father suggested that I should go over and pay my respects to my grandmother, of whom I had seen very little since entering the army. So one morning in July I mounted my horse and rode to Wiversdale. Mrs. Estcourt was now a very old woman, verging on eighty-five, but as active as it is possible for a person of that advanced age to be, taking her daily walk in the garden, and reading print without the least difficulty. I understood, however, that her memory had become rather clouded of late years, and therefore I was not surprised when I first entered the familiar library to find that she did not recognize me, particularly as I had grown considerably since I had visited her last, and had a good deal of hair upon my face.

"*Who* do you say?" she kept on demanding in shrill accents of her daughters, as they attempted to make her understand the identity of her own grandson.

"*Sam's* son? why that's poor Lascelles; he died before your father, my dear."

"No, mother — this is Gerald, Sampson's second son, who was brought up by Lady Mary, you know."

"I never liked her!" quoth my grandmother irrelevantly.

"No, grandmamma, but I'm sure you'll like me if you'll look at me," I said, thinking it best to storm the fortress of her indifference. Much of my childish dislike of my grandmother had been forgotten as subjects of greater importance to myself had occupied my mind; and as I knelt beside her arm-chair now, and brought my face on a level with hers, I saw that age had softened the expression of her features until it was too much like that of my sick father at home to permit me to cherish any enmity against her.

The old lady took my face between her hands, and regarded me with a look of pleased surprise.

"Why, this is *Sampson*," she ejaculated; "this is Sampson himself, when he made me so angry by refusing to follow his father's business, and took to writing those trashy books instead."

"No, mother, it isn't," shouted one of my aunts in a testy manner into her ear, "it's Sampson's boy: I should think you might understand that."

"I know, my dear, I know," said my grandmother quietly, deprecating the noise by holding up her wrinkled hand; "but he's very like Sampson, very like indeed. And where is your father, why hasn't he come too?" All the time she was speaking she kept stroking my face with her fingers, an action so widely different from anything I had previously connected with her feelings

towards myself, that I could scarcely believe I was kneeling beside Mrs. Estcourt of Wiversdale. I explained the cause of my father's detention, and told her that he would be sure to come to see her as soon as he could walk again.

"And in the meanwhile, you must accept me instead, grandmother, and make the most of me, for I cannot stay long." I then proceeded to give her all the news concerning my father, mother, and sisters, to which she listened complacently. As I mentioned Lady Mary, I saw that the old resentful spirit against her had not died out of my aunts' breasts; but Mrs. Estcourt, if she experienced, did not manifest anything of the kind. She heard all that I had to tell her with apparent interest, but her intellect was evidently weakened; I found it hard work to make her understand which of my sisters I meant, by name, though she met me, directly I spoke of Beatrice, with the old objection, "*Anne*, you mean."

"Yes, grandmamma, *Anne*," I replied. It no longer appeared to me worth while to fight with one so near the grave, and thenceforth I gave in to her little prejudices — even to answering to the name of Sampson, by which she invariably called me; and her sarcastic nature appearing to have been lost with her memory, I have little doubt that an affection would have been established between us had I been much at Wiversdale at that time, but the state of my father's health kept me close to Grasslands. I perceived that this total change in my grandmother's manner towards myself, gave great dissatisfaction to her immediate relatives. The tables were turned now for the domineering mistress of Wiversdale; her sons

and daughters ruled the roast, and she who had been so sharp and snappish with other people, so quick to sneer and to take offence, was snapped up and domineered over herself, and forced by age and debility to submit where she had governed. It was seeing her thus which made my pride relent towards her, and myself forget the fancied injuries she had done me through my mother. There was something so pitiful in viewing the downfall of her erst-while indomitable spirit, and to find her turning even towards me, whom I had always imagined she had so greatly disliked, for protection against the tongues of her own children. She seemed to have grown quite afraid of my aunts, much more so than of my uncles, though they were all now constantly at Wiversdale, taking up their residence there, and issuing their orders as if the house and establishment already belonged to themselves. My grandmother was extremely anxious about my father's health, although she never said a word on the subject before her other sons or daughters. But if we happened to be alone for a few minutes, she would pluck me by the sleeve and whisper, "How is your father, Sampson? is he better to-day?"

And when I had made a due report of the case, she would add —

"Ah! he's a fine man; he's a very clever man; he's a son to be proud of — but I wish he didn't write those trashy novels."

The "ruling passion strong in death" was forcibly pictured here: my poor old grandmother had forgotten almost everything but the few inconsequential trifles which her bygone obstinacy had chosen to magnify into subjects of importance. I have said before that I was

not much at Wiversdale at this period, from choice as well as necessity: Mrs. Estcourt, in her present mood, was well enough; but I could not stand the cool reception which I invariably met at the hands of my other relations, particularly at those of Mrs. Logan, who seemed to have established herself in attendance on her mother, and to whom I felt convinced my cousin had related the circumstances under which I had parted with him. My uncles occasionally visited us at Grasslands, where they ate my father's dinners and drank his wine, and where the potent spell of his presence prevented their intercourse with myself appearing otherwise than friendly. But we were always happier when we were by ourselves. As soon as my father was sufficiently freed from pain to be able to think, he took to his writing again, and spent nearly all his mornings at his desk. One day on his expressing a wish that I cared for the same sort of work, I ventured to tell him how I had employed my time at Freshwave. He immediately became excited on the subject, and begged that I would read out my manuscript to him. At first I was diffident of doing so: it is true he was my father, but he was also one of the best judges of literature of the day. But he encouraged me to proceed by relating anecdotes of his own early failures. In this instance I am afraid his critical taste permitted itself to be blinded by his fatherly pride: bribery and corruption there must have been somewhere, for I remember how enthusiastic was his praise of my performance, and *I have it by me still.*

It was "capital!" it was "first rate!" it was "drawn to the life!" it was the "best thing he had ever heard from a maiden pen!" Such were amongst

a few of the commendations which the first-born of my brain received from the author of my being. At last his praise was exhausted; but not so his enthusiasm. Blackman must see the manuscript (Blackman was his own publisher); he was quite sure Blackman would be of the same opinion as himself, and think that my novel ought to come out at once. Accordingly the papers were forwarded to Mr. Blackman, who, in the course of a few weeks returned a favourable verdict. I have nothing but good to say of this gentleman, with whom I have had the pleasure of transacting some very profitable business since; but I must be allowed to express my opinion that his own was, in that instance, if not guided, considerably swayed by the fact that a certain Parton Estcourt, M.P. was not only a very powerful author, but a very powerful man. My father, however, would not listen to any suspicions I entertained on the subject; but insisted that Blackman was a shrewd, clever fellow — a fellow to be depended on — a fellow who knew what he was about; and that since he found that his decision tallied with his own, he had a higher opinion of him than ever. We all know how sick people have their whims and fancies: how they will seize upon a new idea, and for lack of distraction make it their hobby, until a fresher one crops up: in this way my father set to work to revise my manuscript for the press, and rested not until it was completed. He took thrice the interest in the book that I did, doing everything himself even to correcting the proofs, and carrying on a long correspondence with printers and publishers relative to title-pages, tinted paper, and bevelled boards. I believe that no novel that ever appeared yet was made so great a fuss about; but the

occupation and little excitement kept my father in good spirits: it was something for him to think and talk of; and so the publication of it did the same service for his physical pain that the writing had done for my mental suffering. At last the preliminaries for its appearance were all completed, and my bantling went to the press under the title of "The Quarry of Fate." Meanwhile August had slipped into September; the shooting season had commenced, and I was out with my gun every day. It was solitary work tramping over the turnipfields and the stubble all by myself, and to think of my poor father who had been as active as I was two seasons before, tied so completely by the leg that he might as well have been bedridden; but to shoot alone is better than not to shoot at all. I had had hopes of procuring the company of Jack Lascelles; but there had been some temporary disturbance in Ireland, where he was then quartered, and his leave had been refused from the Horse Guards. My brothers-in-law, Lyndon and Talbot, were coming to us later in the season; but for the first month I was alone. Walking daily over a large expanse of ground, much of which led past the habitations of man, necessarily implied a certain number of mild adventures, and one of mine was of rather a pleasant nature than otherwise. I had several times during my wanderings in our grounds, encountered a couple of young girls, apparently sisters, who invariably, amidst a great deal of giggling, ran away at my approach. But when the same thing had happened two or three mornings in succession, I asked the gamekeeper who accompanied me if he knew who they were.

"Well, sir," was the reply, "I believe their name

rightly is Sherman; leastways they live in the same house with parties going by that name. One of the new line of houses, sir, the other side of the village: they've been mostly taken by strangers, and I can't say I know much about 'em. These — these — young ladies, sir, haven't received no permission as I know of to be on the grounds, and if it's your pleasure I'll warn 'em off."

I could quite understand the gamekeeper's hesitation as he endeavoured to give the girls I have mentioned their proper designation. They were not young *ladies*, any one could see that; and yet they appeared too refined to come under the category of young *women*, technically applied.

Several changes had taken place in the village of Grasslands since we had resided there, and one was the building of a row of cockney-looking houses, which were neither villas nor cottages, and were chiefly inhabited by the better style of artisans, or small tradesmen. Our long absence from the place, except during the shooting season, had doubtless given the villagers a good deal of licence in the way of walking over the more unfrequented parts of our grounds; and my giggling friends were too young and too pretty for me to entertain such an idea as "warning" them off the property. The constant *rencontres*, however, added to their very evident desire to attract my notice, naturally led to my speaking to them, particularly when, as I suddenly approached them one day, with my gun over my shoulder, I heard first a smothered shriek; then a scuffle, and the words, "Run, Addy — here he is again!"

I think, under the circumstances, there are very

few young men who would not have given chase. I came up with them at the padlocked gate of the next field, which they were making violent attempts to climb.

"Now," I said, "what do you suppose I ought to do to you for trespassing on my grounds in this manner?"

They looked at one another with elevated eyebrows; and then burst out laughing, and said, "*Don't* Addy!" and "*Don't*, Juli!" with an impatient movement of the elbows as they spoke, I holding them meanwhile in fast imprisonment and examining them closely. They were exceedingly pretty girls, I was going to add for their station in life; but I believe that for *animal* beauty the lower classes are not to be surpassed. These sisters (for they were sisters) were both in possession of big blue eyes, straight noses, and ripe pouting lips: their complexions were very fair, and their hair almost flaxen: their figures were small and well formed, and if their hands and feet did not bear upon them the unmistakeable marks of blood, they were at all events not large enough to court especial notice. So much I observed in a very short time, and also that, notwithstanding the similarity of their features, the one who was called "Juli" was the prettier of the two, and "Addy" was the more impudent.

"Do you know that there is a board in this field to the effect that all trespassers will be prosecuted with the utmost rigour of the law?" I repeated, in a voice of portentous gravity.

They continued to look at one another, and laugh; but every now and then the four blue eyes glanced

archly in my face, with an expression that seemed to say their owners would not be silent long.

"Now, what excuse have you to make for yourselves, in order that I may not take proceedings against you?"

"We are not trespassers," said one of the girls, "we are ladies."

"I grant the last fact," I said, doffing my Glengarry, "but not the first. You are trespassers, and I shall inflict a fine upon you. Prisoners at the bar — what are your names?"

This feeble witticism was received with such shouts of laughter that I perceived my character for being a wag was established at once.

"My name is Adelaide Sherman, and my sister's is Julia," said the least pretty, and most pert-looking of the two.

"Very good," I replied; "perhaps you have saved your head by that answer. Now, will Miss Julia decide what penalty she considers I ought to inflict upon her?"

I looked at the other sister as I spoke, and she blushed most becomingly under my scrutiny; and when I repeated the question, replied —

"I think it will be quite sufficient punishment for us to be helped over the gate by you."

"Brava," I exclaimed, raising her in my arms. "I demand immediate payment of the forfeit." So I lifted them both over the gate, and took off my cap, as they ran like hares towards the village, Adelaide looking back, with a laugh and a nod, which nearly led me into the folly of a second pursuit. When I turned back

to rejoin the gamekeeper, I found him, with a grim smile struggling through his look of respect.

"A queer lot, Jenkins!" I observed, with the air of a *connoisseur*.

"Very queer, sir, begging your pardon; their faces will be their *mis*fortune, as the saying goes. Will you take the Home Close to-day, sir?"

I would; and fourteen brace of partridges soon drove the remembrance of Miss Addy and Miss Juli Sherman out of my mind. I mentioned the circumstance to my father in the course of the evening, but he did not know the name of Sherman; he concluded they were new comers; if the girls were troublesome I'd better give them a hint to quit; half-and-half people were often very presuming and difficult to get rid of. He had had a letter from Blackman, and the "Quarry of Fate" would appear on the 15th of the month. Had I written to Beatrice as he had desired me? and thus dismissed the subject.

But I did not give the Misses Sherman notice to quit, although I had plenty of opportunities of doing so, as I never failed to meet them daily, either in the grounds or the village. They appeared to spend all their time out of doors, and most of it in lying in wait for myself. It was not easy work flirting with two girls at once; in fact, I found it very difficult, especially as Miss Adelaide proved of a jealous disposition, and was apt to make our strolls unpleasant if I paid too much attention to her sister. Julia was my favourite, not only because she was prettier and more refined than the other, but because, if not more retiring, she was less openly pert than Adelaide. But they were

always together, and therefore I had little opportunity of showing my preference.

For several weeks I flirted with these girls in a very decided, but withal a very commonplace manner; flirted positively because I had nothing better to do, and they threw themselves so constantly in my way that I could not avoid them. During which time I wasted a good deal of money on presents for them, and received at least an equal number of kisses in return; but having arrived at this stage of the proceedings I began to get a little weary of the whole affair. I had no intention of wronging either of them, and their station in life of course precluded any idea of marriage; I felt, therefore, as if I had reached a barred gate in the course of my flirtation, over which I could neither climb nor vault, and so I turned my attention in another direction with the greatest complacency. The middle of the month was now past, and my book had appeared. The *outside* was all that an author could desire, and my father declared that the story read better in print than it had done in manuscript. He waited therefore, with much anxiety, to see the opinions of the press upon it, an anxiety which I confess to have fully shared with him. They soon appeared, and for a first work were decidedly favourable.

"Mr. Gerald Estcourt," said one of the principal papers, "has discovered the great secret of success in novel-writing. He paints men and women as they *are*, not as they ought to be; and his story is consequently true to nature, and appeals to the hearts of those who read it."

"We hail," enthusiastically wrote a second, "the

appearance of a novel by the son of Mr. Parton Estcourt, one of England's most widely-read authors, whose works are as celebrated for their cleverness as they are for their popularity. Mr. Gerald Estcourt's work contains much of the forcible style of his father's writing, combined with a pathos and tenderness of treatment which cannot fail to secure him many readers."

"A book of great promise," so ran a third review: "full of beauties of expression and style, mingled with a dash of sarcasm which reminds us of the justly-renowned works of the author's father. Mr. G. Estcourt in his 'Quarry of Fate' has done well; but he will do much better; we prognosticate for him a speedy rise to the first ranks of our native novelists."

These extracts are a few out of the many notices which appeared, and delighted my father as of course they delighted me also. I had been very modest as I contemplated the fate of my book. I knew it was as good as many that issued from the press; but with the name of my father to maintain, I felt that the productions of my pen should rise above the level of ordinary literature. I had feared for him more than for myself. I had been so afraid for the shame and disappointment he should feel when my work was dissected by the critics, and its dishonoured carcase thrown out to rot upon the dunghill of obscurity, as so many had done before it. I had thought then that I should be contented with a very small *quantum* of praise; that the mildest commendation would be thankfully received; but the danger successfully passed, I began, agreeably to poor human nature, to plume myself, and strut about and crow, and wonder that with the knowledge of the *divine afflatus* within me, I should ever have

contemplated a serious defeat. I did a little of the literary haw-haw style during those days; talked largely of the impossibility of real strength ever being kept in the background, and how, in the long run, force of mind *must tell*, whatever the disadvantages under which it laboured; talked a great deal of nonsense, in fact, to which my father listened with fond complacency, and my uncles with shrugging shoulders. I patronized the reviewing papers also; praised them for their discernment and clearness of judgment; and wondered how any one could be in such dread of a "slating" from them, except indeed when they published trash, which fell still-born from the press. This remark being made in the presence of my uncle William, who had written a pamphlet the year before, which had been deservedly annihilated for the impossible theories it professed to uphold, did not tend to impress that gentleman in favour of myself or my production.

I was deeply struck by the wisdom of the paper last quoted, which prophesied that I should become the author of something still better than "The Quarry of Fate," and wished to begin another book at once in consequence, thinking that every hour now devoted by me to other pursuits was a fraud upon the world, which was impatiently waiting to hear from me again. But in this instance my father's sense outstripped his affection. He begged, he even insisted that I should permit a reasonable interval to elapse before I made my second bow to the public. So far I had done well; but my next attempt should be much better, and between this and that I must travel and enlarge my mind. When he had fully recovered his health, he said, he should much like to make a continental tour

in my company: we would penetrate into Italy, even to Spain together. After such a holiday we should both return refreshed to our work again. So we planned, and so we proposed to put into execution. Meanwhile September was over, and the Lyndons and Talbots were with us.

CHAPTER XIV.

"When *he had fully recovered his health;*" the words seemed to strike with a sad resonance upon my mental hearing, as one afternoon I strolled down the village street of Grasslands alone. I had commenced to feel very anxious about my father; the temporary excitement consequent on the preparation and publication of my book having subsided, his health had visibly retrograded, and I could not help seeing how much weaker each paroxysm of pain left him. The bare idea of my hearty energetic father becoming crippled or enfeebled for the remainder of his life was dreadful to me. I turned the horrid thought into a lively whistle, and with rapid steps attempted to outwalk my fancy.

"Good-evening, sir; we have had a splendid day."

I had already gained the outskirts of the village, and was passing the new-built row of houses previously alluded to. Raising my eyes at this unexpected address, I encountered the form of a man in his shirt-sleeves, who was leaning over the railings of one of the little gardens, smoking a long clay pipe. I knew the number of the house inhabited by the parents of the Sherman girls, although I had never been inside it, and I concluded the stranger before me was their father, although I had not had the honour of a personal introduction to him before.

"Good-evening to you; we have so."

I was busy with my own thoughts and speculations,

and had no inclination to enter into a promiscuous conversation with him. But Mr. Sherman seemed disposed to improve the acquaintance.

"I hope that your respected father is better to-day, sir."

I could not but stop then and reply to the inquiry, whereupon he opened the gate and pressed me to enter.

"I trust you will do me the honour to step inside, Mr. Estcourt; our little domicile can hardly compare with the Hall; but an Englishman's house is his castle, you know, sir, all the world over. I believe you are already acquainted with my young ladies; they are both at home, and will be pleased to see you — I can answer for them — and so will Mrs. Sherman."

I murmured some plea of want of time and engagements at home; but he stood there, bowing, with the gate open, until I thought the shortest way would be to do as he desired me. He was an unpleasant-looking man: large-headed and small-bodied, with the eye of a serpent and the voice of a dove; a man who would talk another over against his will, but to oppose whose suave pertinacity must inevitably end in ill words. He ushered me into a little sitting-room, which was filled with a glaring sun, and had a general air over it of woollen mats and anti-macassars; and introduced me to Mrs. Sherman, a faded, flaxen-haired nonentity in crushed cap and creased gown, from whom it was evident the daughters had derived their beauty, whilst their impudence probably came from the other side. The walls of the apartment were hung with third or fourth-rate oil-paintings of dogs, horses, and houses;

and in a very few minutes the *père de famille* enlightened me on the nature of his occupation.

"An artist, sir," he said, inquiringly; "do anything in this line?" waving his hand towards the productions in question. I told him that I regretted to say I possessed no such talent; that my accomplishments were, in fact, very few and far between; at which Miss Juli and Miss Addy giggled, and the faded mother exclaimed, with a deprecating wave of her mittened hand, "Don't say so."

"You mustn't expect the ladies to believe that, sir," continued Mr. Sherman, with an air of facetious patronage; "but all are not gifted in the same manner. I was born, Mr. Estcourt, with a brush in my hand."

Without stopping to inquire into the particulars of such a natural phenomenon, I remarked that I concluded the paintings I saw around me were by himself.

"Exactly so, sir, *pre*-cisely; I trust that they meet with your approbation. The one just before you is the seat of Lord Exeter, taken from the north, and considered to be the best view of the park in existence; the horse on your right" (Mr. Sherman did not positively drop his H's, but he had a wonderful facility for slurring over dangerous ground) "is his lordship's favourite hunter; the one next to it, her ladyship's Arab galloway, both portraits acknowledged to be life-like. The next view is of the cottage where Lord Burnham spent his honeymoon; an interesting reminiscence, you perceive, Mr. Estcourt. And this painting just behind my head is a likeness of Mr. Alfred Marsh's jockey, and his celebrated horse, 'Play-

ful,' that won the Chester Cup in 18—. I have several more paintings, if you'd like to step upstairs; one, an historical subject, which I flatter myself will repay you for the trouble. You must forgive the enthusiasm of an artist, sir — we live in our productions."

I thought it was a fortunate thing for Mr. Sherman if he could live *in* his productions, for there did not appear much sign of his being able to live *by* them, considering the number of orders which had never been "called for." The house, too, was very barely furnished: the dress of the women tawdry and dirty; whilst the assumption of "gentility" thrown over the whole made the absence of it painfully apparent. I commenced to grow fidgetty, and to rack my brain for an excuse to make my escape. I declined to inspect the historical picture on that occasion with as much civility as I could muster, and pulling out my watch, hinted at the approach of my dinner-hour.

"Not half-past five yet, sir," exclaimed the officious Sherman, consulting his own timepiece. "You have a fine place up there, I hear," alluding to Grasslands. I acquiesced in the remark, and he continued —

"I have often wished to take the liberty of asking you if I might go over the grounds, some day. My young ladies describe them to me as being very beautifully laid out."

I said they were considered so, and that I would give him an order at some future period for inspecting them. At present, my father's illness precluded, &c., &c.

"Of course, sir, of course. Ah! gout is a sad trial — we often think of the poor old gentleman down

here. You *have* a view of the Hall, I presume, Mr. Estcourt?"

"No; not that I am aware of. But I am really afraid I must take my leave, Mr. Sherman."

"Ten thousand pities, sir! it would make a beautiful picture, and one which you ought to possess — which your heirs will value after you. I should take it from the west wing, Mr. Estcourt, bringing in the lawn and shrubberies to the side; it would not run very expensive, either — a mere trifle — but it's an order which I should have the greatest pleasure in taking from you, sir."

I saw now what the man was driving at, and agreeable to anything which should procure me my release, I commissioned him to paint me a picture of Grasslands, without even asking the price which he charged for his abominable productions. His enthusiastic gratitude disgusted me still more than his bombastic speech had done, and rising from my seat I cut his eloquence short by bidding "Good afternoon" to Mrs. Sherman and her daughters.

"Oh! you *must* have a cup of tea with us before you go," expostulated Miss Adelaide, as she strove with ready facetiousness to replace me in the chair I had vacated.

"Yes, surely," drawled Mrs. Sherman, arraying her mittened hands upon her lap; whilst the husband had the effrontery to clap me on the back and tell me there was no "hurry." "Addy, my dear, tell Jane to bring in the tea-tray at once, and set it by the open window; it will be so much the cooler and more cheerful."

Tea at the open window with Mrs. Sherman and the

gentleman in shirt-sleeves! *C'était un peu trop.* I pictured myself, under the circumstances, being gazed at by every servant and ploughboy passing that way, who would not fail to spread the report far and wide that they had seen "Muster Estcourt" taking his tea in the Shermans' "parlour." Whilst Adelaide flew to minister to my delight, I was base enough to beat a hasty retreat, which no remonstrances from the artist, deprecations from the mother, or looks of entreaty from the pretty Julia, could induce me to forego. Even then I was not quite out of danger. As I backed towards the sitting-room door — meeting each attack of my enemies with the formal phrases of "I am very sorry," "I regret exceedingly," "It is quite unavoidable," &c., I perceived that Julia Sherman kept looking first towards me and then towards her father, until he blurted out —

"You want to walk up to the Hall with him, do you, you baggage? Well, get on your hat, then; I dare say Mr. Estcourt here won't be the one to make an objection," with a knowing wink at myself. But I was not to be saddled completely against my will.

"I am sure Miss Sherman will understand me," I replied, "when I say that, however delightful the prospect of a walk with her is to me, I think she had better not accompany me to-day, as business takes me straight to the Hall, and I could not think of permitting her to return alone."

The girl looked disappointed; but her father patted her on the shoulders, and said, "Never mind, July. Mr. Estcourt is quite right; daylight isn't the time for courting, is it, sir?"

I made no direct answer to this remark, but bid-

ding them a hasty adieu, walked out of the cottage door. As I did so, I was indignant, both at the familiarity which Sherman had assumed towards myself, owing, as I supposed, to my acquaintance with his daughters, and also at the attempt he had made to link my name with that of Julia. The business had gone too far — I saw that plainly; it must be put a stop to altogether. It was all very well to slink about our own shrubberies and plantations with these girls, but quite another thing to be seen walking with them through the village in broad daylight; very pleasant to look into their blue eyes and squeeze their little waists, since they took care I should have plenty of opportunities of doing so, but a widely different pastime to be drinking tea with their progenitors in the sight of the whole population of Grasslands. I could have sat down in the cottage of one of my father's labourers, and eaten bread and cheese with him, without feeling that I lowered my dignity by doing so; but to associate with this half-and-half family in their half-and-half house was too much for my powers of endurance. I had fully felt the position I held in Grasslands as the only son of the only landed proprietor there, and had always been careful to do nothing within its precincts that should bring discredit on my father's name, or put him under the disagreeable necessity of remonstrating with me on my conduct. As I walked to the Hall that afternoon I regretted that I had been so thoughtless as to flirt as much as I had done with the Sherman girls; but it is almost as difficult for a young fellow to avoid meeting a woman's advances halfway as it is for him to keep his hand in his pocket when he

knows he has plenty of money there. Yet I had never intended or dreamt that my apparently chance meetings with the daughters should lead to an acquaintanceship with the parents. If I was not careful, that man with the serpent-like eyes and dove-like voice would be trying to force me into a breach of promise of marriage case, or to compromise matters by hush-money, or some such villany. He looked just the subject for such an attempt; but he had come to the wrong person if he thought that I could be frightened into making a fool of myself. I determined to cut the acquaintance of the whole family from that day; the girls had got several brooches and bracelets and rings out of me, and they must be contented with their spoils. Having company at the Hall was a very good excuse for not taking any more evening rambles, even should I be solicited to do so. My meditations were cut short, as I approached our drive gates, by the appearance of a servant who was looking up the road and down the road, as if in search of somebody. As soon as he caught sight of me, he left his position and advanced to meet me.

"If you please, sir, would you go on to the Hall? Mrs. Talbot wishes to speak to you."

"All right; I was going there." I imagined that a flock of uncles, or male cousins had probably swooped upon us from Wiversdale, as was often their custom when they found the latter place particularly dull, and that my brothers-in-law being both absent, Emmeline and Gertrude did not know what to do with them until I arrived. I walked straight up to the house, therefore — the servant following me — but to my surprise was met in the hall by Emmy herself, her face bathed in tears.

"Why, what's the matter, Emmy?" I exclaimed, taking alarm.

"Oh, Gerald! we have been longing for you to return. Poor papa is in such dreadful pain, and I have telegraphed for Dr. Percivale to come at once; nothing seems to do him any good; we have been trying everything we can think of, but he gets worse every minute."

I felt my cheeks blanch under her intelligence.

"Where is he?" I exclaimed, hastily throwing down my hat and stick.

"In bed, dear; we put him there an hour ago, by his own request: do go up and see him, Gerald; he has asked for you a dozen times."

I flew up the stairs, and found everything as she had told me. My father was in bed, his features distorted with the agony he was undergoing, although not a sound escaped him. In attendance on him were Gertrude and two women servants, who had been applying every remedy recommended by the doctor for an emergency, without effect; and their faces were pallid from witnessing the pain they had no power to relieve. When I went up to my father's side, he could not speak to me, although he pressed the hand in which I clasped his own with fierce energy, and his resolute eyes turned to meet mine with the look of a martyr.

"When did this come on?" I inquired of my sister.

"About two hours ago," she replied. "He would have cold applications to his foot this morning, you know, and he was sitting up as usual, when he complained of a great deal of pain, and it increased so

rapidly that he was as bad as he is now, when we got him into bed. He says it has risen to his stomach, Gerald. We sent two messengers in different directions after you, and Emmeline telegraphed to London at once, so I trust Dr. Percivale will be down here by the last train. But I was sure that cold water would do him harm."

"Did Emmeline say it was urgent? Have you sent a carriage to meet Dr. Percivale?" I asked anxiously, but my voice shook as I spoke.

My father perceived it, and pressed my hand. I turned towards him, and notwithstanding the expression of anxiety in his eyes, he seemed in less pain.

"How are you now, father?" I inquired.

"Dying, Gerald."

He said the words with a gasp, and yet so decidedly that I dared not dispute them, though they struck on my heart like ice. The idea had not occurred to me before; and yet something told me he was right: and — I cannot describe what I felt; such moments are past description. Gertrude sprung forward, crying.

"Oh, no, papa! don't say that: it's only your fancy: Dr. Percivale will be here soon. It's the dreadful pain makes you think so; it must be terrible to bear; I wish I could bear it for you, poor darling; but I am sure Dr. Percivale will know what to do for it." And then she fell to sobbing, with her face buried in the bedclothes. My father reached out his hand and placed it on her head —

"God bless you, my love, and all your sex; but you generally talk about what you know nothing." And then there followed another fearful paroxym of agony, during which we could only stand by his side,

and watch his throes with curdled blood, and hearts which had nearly stopped beating. By the last train Dr. Percivale arrived, and confirmed our worst suspicions: the gout had flown to the stomach, was threatening the regions of the heart. Before the night was over, two of the most eminent physicians in London had been telegraphed for, and were at Grasslands with the morning; but their combined endeavours failed to arrest the steps of the disease which was destined to bear away my father's life. My sisters and I never left him: silently we grouped around his bed, anxious only, in the interval of his pain, to catch some word of affection that should remain with us when he was gone. As soon as the physicians had expressed their opinion of his case, he desired to know it. Perceiving that Dr. Percivale hesitated to give it —

"My opinion has swayed — thousands in my lifetime," said my father, in that spasmodic manner which showed that there was mischief about the heart, "do you want to make me out a fool — upon my deathbed?"

Then he was told, as gently as possible, that as far as human knowledge was to be depended on, his case was hopeless, as every endeavour to provoke the enemy to quit his hold of the interior, and to appear at the outposts, had been made without success.

"I *knew* it was!" he exclaimed, almost triumphantly, "and if you had said otherwise, I should not have believed you. I never was mistaken."

The two physicians returned to London: the news of my father's danger was sent to Wiversdale; and his room was thenceforth invaded by relations, who came to sympathise with him upon his approaching death.

He received them all kindly — when he was able to speak — but their visits worried him intensely.

"It's great humbug, Gerald!" he would whisper to me, when they were gone. "They wouldn't have travelled five miles out of their way to shake hands with me whilst I was well; but each one must needs come to stare, now I lie dying. It reminds me of the dead lion, boy, and the jackass who kicked at him."

One thought had disturbed me greatly since the imminent danger of my father had been communicated to me, and this was, that he should leave the world without a personal reconciliation with my mother. Yet, in his present state of irritation and pain, I dared not broach any subject which might possibly distress him. During the next afternoon, however, when he was a little easier, he spoke to me of it himself.

"Gerald — I shan't last many days at this rate — and I think I ought to see your mother before I die — It can't make much difference; for I hope we have both forgiven — long ago; but it may be pleasanter for her to think of afterwards — I've left everything I possess to you, my boy — except a few thousands to Emmeline; for Beatrice and Gertrude are well provided for; and Lady Mary must look after the other girls; but I should like you — when I'm gone, to let your mother live at Grasslands — for the rest of her life. Will you do this, Gerald?"

"You know I will, father," I replied — "anything that is a wish of yours. Shall I telegraph to my mother, or shall I write?"

"Better telegraph — I don't think I shall see her otherwise. — Tell her to bring the girls with her; or

only Lily — if the little one can't travel. I *should* like to — see their little faces again: I wish I had had them — to stay with me before I got ill."

Although Lilias and Marguerite were both older than myself, my father, owing to his not having seen them since they left Grasslands with their mother, always spoke of them as if they still were children. I telegraphed to Guildford at once, signifying with sufficient plainness the extreme danger he was in, and his desire to see Lady Mary and her daughters as soon as they could reach him. I informed Emmeline of the step my father had told me to take on his behalf; and she, with myself, fully expecting the speedy arrival of my mother and sisters, ordered rooms to be prepared for their reception. In the meanwhile, the second day wore away, and the second night was at hand. I was sitting by my father's bedside, whilst he had sunk, from sheer weakness, into a brief slumber, when I heard the sound of carriage-wheels along the gravelled drive. I supposed it was my mother; and grew quite agitated as I reflected on the interview to come, and wondered what its effects would be upon these two who had sworn to pass their lives together, and after a separation of more than twenty years had only consented to meet as one of them was fast slipping away into eternity. Presently the little bustle which usually attends a new arrival was distinctly heard, and next the sound of many footsteps ascending the stairs. I should have started forward, but my father had fast hold of my hand, and I feared to wake him. What could it be? My sister would never be so careless as to introduce Lady Mary to the sick chamber without a proper warning. In another minute my doubts were solved: the bedroom

door was opened, and there entered — my grandmother. She, who had given up church-going and visiting, and even driving in a carriage; who had not been out of her own grounds for years past, had driven ten miles in the evening air to see her sick son; she, who had been said to have no heart, or feelings of womanly compassion; to scorn the notion of weakness, and to ridicule affection as affectation; had made this unusual effort rather than my father should go out of the world without speaking to her again. The poor old lady looked very shrunk and feeble, as she walked slowly up to the bedside; and there was a hollow appearance about her eyes, as if they had sunk since I had seen them last. My father roused himself at her approach, and held out his hand.

"This is very kind of you, mother, — I didn't think I should see you again; — well, you won't be long after me, any way, will you?"

My grandmother sat down in the chair which I vacated for her; and I saw that her whole frame was trembling with emotion; but she put out her shaking hand and laid it feebly upon that of her son.

"We've had a good many quarrels, mother, haven't we?" resumed the sick man, "and I've been too fond of having my own way — but I've left the family a name to be proud of — though you haven't been proud of me."

Mrs. Estcourt began to whimper; old age had not left her the strength to sob.

"I *have* been proud of you, my son; proud of you and of your children. Oh! Sampson, I've loved you better than them all put together."

My aunts Sarah and Susan were in the room at

the time, as well as my sisters; but no one stirred or expressed surprise at this speech of my grandmother's, for as she said it, the withered hands were wrung together; the cracked and quavering voice rose into a cry of bereavement, and the scene was too impressive not to be accepted in silent sympathy by all. My father received it in the firm strong manner in which he had met every circumstance in his life whether of joy or sorrow.

"I am glad to know it, mother; but my death isn't worth fretting about to you. If you should stay any time after me, though, — be kind to my children." She promised him that she would, and after a brief farewell the interview was closed. They were both too weak, the one from age, the other from approaching death, to be able to stand any excitement long. I accompanied my poor old grandmother down stairs, and helped to put her into the carriage, a task which was by no means easy. As I kissed her to say "good-bye," she held my face close to hers, and began to cry afresh over it. I thought of her words to my father, "I have loved you more than them all," and was patient. A common grief makes us more than kin. Then the carriage drove away, and I returned to the sick-bed.

We had expected Lady Mary to arrive all that day, and as night closed in I began to fear that my telegram had not reached her; but when I consulted Dr. Percivale about sending another, he expressed his opinion that it was impossible she could arrive in time, and I thought it best to spare her the pain of arriving too late. My father's sufferings were now pretty well over, but had been succeeded by an extreme weakness, which was not expected to carry him through the night. He con-

tinued to doze off at intervals, but he was perfectly quiet and sensible between whiles. At one time he expressed his regret to me not to have seen Beatrice (who was in Italy), and told me to give her his love and blessing: at another, he asked if my mother had arrived; and when I replied in the negative, but said I hoped she might yet see him alive, answered —

"It will not make much difference either way: — tell her I forgave her, Gerald, and I hope she forgave me — we were both wrong, I dare say — but I should have remembered she was only a woman. I hope we may meet yet — where there will be no squabbling of any kind. She can't say that I haven't loved her children — whatever I did herself."

The next time he woke, he continued as if there had been no interruption to his speech —

"I hope she will live at Grasslands — I think I shall be happier if she comes back to her old home — and I can think of the children being here. How old am I, Gerald?"

"Sixty-five, father."

"Am I really? so old as that! — Why it's time I went, anyway; and I should never have been of much use again. — I only went down to the House twice this session. — Shall I last till the morning, Gerald?"

"Hardly, father." I would not indulge in any expressions of my grief before him, because I knew how much he disliked anything of the sort; but I could not help my voice breaking, and he was quick to notice every change.

"Don't fret, my child!" He said the words as tenderly as if I really had been a child, laying his hand on my arm as he spoke. "I'd rather you didn't

call the girls — poor things, they're so chicken-hearted — you'll stay with me, Gerald, won't you?"

"To the last moment."

Dr. Percivale stole in and out during the night, so did my sisters, but none of them stayed long, and the servants were waiting in the ante-chamber.

"Go on with your writing, Gerald! but *not too fast*, mind that; — you must write for us both now; I leave you my name: don't soil it." Then after a pause, "You must leave the army — you cannot do two things well. Remember our motto, 'Labore vinces.'"

The last moment came only too soon. At three o'clock in the morning, when my sisters were in their beds, the servants nodding in the next apartment, and even the watchful Dr. Percivale had consented to stretch himself upon the sofa in the dining-room, and cover his head with his pocket-handkerchief, my father opened his eyes, and turned them upon me.

"Gerald, boy! lift me up, I'm going!"

I passed my arm beneath him and raised him in the bed.

"I have — loved you — better — than them all — put together," he said, and died.

His last words to me were those his mother had used to himself, and the realization of the fact sent a thrill of pleasure through my heart, which the sequel soon dispelled. Assured that he was really gone, I summoned the doctor and the servants; and leaving the lifeless body in their charge, rushed to my own room; and for the first time since his illness had taken a dangerous turn, found leisure to consider the stern truth that henceforth I was to be fatherless, and my own master.

CHAPTER XV.

As soon as I had recovered the first shock of my father's death, I began to wonder that we had neither seen nor heard anything of Lady Mary. It appeared almost incredible that the telegram should have miscarried, and yet such an accident was the only solution of the mystery that my sisters and I could accept. We came to the conclusion that some cross-country telegraph office was at fault; and in consequence, I wrote my mother a long letter, detailing the circumstances of our bereavement, and our regret that the message had never reached her, thinking that the mere knowledge of its having been sent would be a comfort to her. I begged her not to make any plans until the funeral was over, when I would pay her a visit at Guildford, and have a talk over her future prospects. Until that had taken place, of course it was impossible for me to leave the house, had I had any inclination to do so. My sisters and I were not allowed much leisure to indulge our grief. As soon as the news of my father's decease had flown round the family, the heads of the different branches arrived from far and near, and took up their residence at Grasslands, to attend the funeral and hear the will read. I had imagined that the week during which a corpse lay in the house was usually one of silent hasty meals, and a divided household; but I found it widely different. My sisters and I were naturally disinclined to issue many orders, or to enter

with much zest into anything which went on; but I had begged my uncles and cousins to consider the house as their own, and they took good care to take me at my word. Eating appeared to go on at all hours of the day: so did loud and ordinary conversation; and although decency forbad their showing themselves beyond the grounds until the funeral had taken place, they managed to make the time pass by strolling about the stables and farm, and pricing the crops and stock. My uncle Jabez had been one of the first to arrive. Strange to say, this brother of my father's, notwithstanding his curt and even rude behaviour, possessed more interest for me than any of the others. It had been matter of surprise to most of Mr. Jabez Estcourt's family that he had never married, particularly as he was supposed to be very rich; I say, supposed, because it was impossible to judge of his real income from the establishment he kept. He resided in a small cottage at Richmond, and his household consisted of two servants, a man and his wife, who did all that he required. Thence he journeyed daily to his business, and was never known to entertain, or suffer himself to be entertained by, any one — except his immediate relations. From these facts, my uncle Jabez had gained the character of being very "close." And it was an interesting speculation amongst the Estcourts, who should eventually inherit the wealth which they concluded he must be accumulating. I was, of course, after my poor father, the next male heir; but I had met with so little favour during my lifetime at the hands of my crusty uncle, that I do not suppose I was even entered on the category of their "eligibles." The next brother in age was William Estcourt (the father

of my friend Joshua), whose eldest son was called 'Jabez," and with respect to whom, therefore, great hopes were entertained. Young Jabez had accompanied his father to Grasslands, and made good use of his opportunities whilst there; following his senior uncle about like a shadow; offering him his aid on every occasion, and receiving the most bearish refusals in the most lamb-like spirit; as it appeared to me, he would have taken a blow, or a kick from him.

My uncle Abel, who was a long thin man of willowy appearance, and seemed as though he had no bone in his back, and the expression of whose mouth suggested the idea that he had just swallowed an emetic, worried me greatly at first by introducing the subject of my soul and my father's soul whenever he could command an audience; but after I had given him one or two sharp replies, he discontinued the practice, and took to the less expressive one of sighing to the ceiling whenever the conversation threatened to lean towards the forbidden topic. My uncle Joshua, as far as his character was concerned, appeared to be a duplicate of my uncle William; he was just such another hard-headed man of business, who had lived so long in the world of City and 'Change, that he had no sympathy left with anything that might not immediately influence the rise and fall of the money market. They had wives and children, both of them, but they never mentioned either; they were men who had the greatest dislike to acknowledge any feeling deeper than such as concerned their monetary affairs; they bottled up their domestic affections for home use, and doubtless occasionally forgot to uncork them even then. My great consolation was in the presence of Lord Portsdowne

and George Lascelles, Jack not having been able to attend. My cousin George was what he had ever been, all affection and sympathy; and when my uncle wrung my hand and told me that as long as he lived I should never want a father, the tears were in his eyes. Had it not been for Dr. Percivale and these two I scarcely know how I should have passed through that week with decorum. They were constantly obliged to entreat me to be more forbearing: to remember *what* lay upstairs; to think that these, my visitors, were *his* nearest relations; his own flesh and blood. But it was this thought that rendered my task of courtesy so difficult to perform. Mr. Logan was there also with his son, who I believe would not have dared to show himself within the walls of Grasslands without the protection of his father's countenance; and Mrs. Logan came in their train, and would have her finger in every pie, from the dressing of my father's body for the grave to the laying out of the dessert for dinner, averring openly and without hesitation that she found the household at sixes and sevens; that nothing had been looked after as it ought to have been; that there had been shameful neglect *somewhere;* and in her opinion, poor dear Sampson must have been positively *robbed.*

I was going to make some reply to her remarks, when Lord Portsdowne laid his hand upon my arm, and I refrained.

"No doubt of it," said Mr. Logan, decisively; "but I am afraid there is little chance of matters being mended now."

"Not under the future *régime*," rejoined his wife, spitefully; "however, that is nothing to us. I can only grieve, as I look around, to see how my poor brother

permitted his extravagant tastes to outrun his prudence. There was no one to restrain or advise him, no one!" and as she spoke she glanced at the pictures which hung round the room.

"I imagine a man has a right to spend his money as he chooses," I said quickly.

"Sampson was always extravagant," observed my uncle William; "from a boy he never denied himself any luxury to which he had taken a fancy: it's a habit which, sooner or later, must lead to embarrassment."

"And, since he imagined that he had acquired such a name for his books," resumed my aunt, "he seems to have thought nothing good enough for him; and for the matter of that" (looking towards the spot where I stood, biting my lips in my endeavours to keep quiet) "to have reared his family in much the same idea; a great error, as will prove itself some day, if I am not mistaken."

"My father's legacy came in very opportunely for Sam," said my uncle Joshua; "he couldn't have kept on in the style he was living much longer, without it. But Sampson was always for outside show; he'd rather have the flimsy thing he called fame, because it makes a man talked about, than a solid fortune. I hope those who come after him may prove to have better sense."

Lord Portsdowne's warning touch was of no more avail; I stepped forward, with eyes that, if they could, would have flashed fire upon the mean defamers of the name once borne by the body now dead upstairs.

"I'll thank you," I commenced, addressing the company in a most determined manner, "as long as you remain under this roof to refrain from carelessly

handling the name of my father, or discussing the motives or consequence of any of his actions. He was worth every one of you put together, a thousand times over; and if he has left me nothing else, I have inherited from him sufficient courage to stand up for those I love, whether they be dead or alive. And I tell you all, that I will not listen to a single slur cast upon his character, either openly or by covert insinuation. If you cannot praise, you can at least be silent."

I did not leave my position after this heated address; I stood and looked round the room for an answer, but none came. My uncles Joshua and William looked foolish; Mrs. Logan even seemed to think that they may have gone too far. At last, in rather a nervous manner, she said that "really, offence seemed to be very quickly taken;" and at the sound of her voice, the men took courage to observe, that the deceased having been so nearly related to themselves they had considered they were at liberty to talk about his doings, particularly as they had mentioned nothing but what all the world knew.

"Possibly!" was my answer; "but this is neither the time nor the place to recall anything but his many virtues. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum.* It is well for us all to remember the words, since we cannot tell how soon we may require the remembrance for ourselves. My father was, at all events, not related to *all* here; and if I look upon your remarks as uncalled for I have considered those of others as impertinent."

This I said addressing the Estcourts, but glancing towards Mrs. Logan, who shuffled about uneasily for a few seconds, and then made some excuse to leave the room. My aunt sniffed palpably, and said: Thank

goodness she didn't understand Latin, or any such rubbish. My uncle William remarked, that it was "early days" for me to take up "Sampson's trick of preaching," and my uncle Joshua looked from one to the other as if he had quite forgotten what the sentence I had quoted meant, and did not like to expose his ignorance by asking.

Mr. Jabez Estcourt was not present at this little scene, having ridden over to Wiversdale early that morning. A short time afterwards he returned, bringing intelligence which drove all other thoughts from our minds. His mode of telling his news and his brothers' mode of receiving it, was so characteristic of the men, that it deserves to be recorded.

It was late on an October afternoon, and cold for the time of year, and when my uncle Jabez entered the dining-room at Grasslands, where all but my sisters were assembled, he walked straight up to the fireplace, and spreading out his coat-tails, commenced to warm himself in the good old British fashion. One of his brothers moved his chair an inch or two backwards to make room for him, but no one spoke except myself.

"Had a cold ride, I suppose, uncle Jabez?"

"Yes," he replied, in the "grumpiest" of tones.

"All well at the Manor?"

To this question he vouchsafed no answer but a grunt, and taking out a toothpick from his pocketbook, began deliberately to pick his teeth.

"How's my mother?" growled uncle William.

"Dead!"

Mrs. Logan let the piece of work upon which she was occupied fall from her hands, and dropped, open

mouthed, into a chair. My uncles Joshua and William looked at their brother for a minute as if to make sure he was not joking; but as he went on steadily picking his teeth, they came to the conclusion that he was in earnest.

"When?" ejaculated the first.

"Three o'clock."

"Humph!" said the second, filially.

"My mother *dead!*" exclaimed Mrs. Logan, who had at last found her tongue; "*never*, Jabez! When did it happen? why didn't they send for me? Sarah and Susan must have known it was coming on. What were they thinking of? Dear me! to think she should be gone, and I wasting the precious moments here; — Gerald, can I have the carriage to return to Wiversdale to-night?"

"Certainly," I replied, only too glad at the prospect of getting rid of her; and in another hour she had taken her departure.

Little by little the details of my grandmother's death were, as it were, *squeezed* out of my uncle Jabez. It appeared that she had been failing ever since her interview with my dying father; had taken to her bed as soon as she had returned to the Manor, and slept away the remainder of her life. The circumstance, at her extreme age, was not to be wondered at; but the way in which her family received the intelligence surprised all but themselves.

"D—n it," exclaimed Lord Portsdowne, bringing his fist down on the table in his hearty manner, "if I thought that George there, or any of my children, would come to sit still in their chairs when they heard their dear mother was gone, even if she lived to one

hundred and eighty, I'd throttle them, Gerald, and that's the truth. It disgusted me, my boy. No wonder poor Mary couldn't get on with these people;" and then remembering *whose* people they were, the dear old fellow stopped short, blushing.

"Never mind, uncle," I said, "you and I are not the ones to discuss the subject. *He* was not like the rest; you know that well enough, and yet my mother couldn't get on with him. It has been a mystery to me all my life, and it will never be solved now."

Before we went to rest that night my uncle Jabez requested to speak to me, and became quite communicative. My father had now been dead four days; he was to be laid in the family vault at Wiversdale, and the funeral had been fixed to take place at the end of the week. He wished to know if I would delay the ceremony for another couple of days, so that the mother and son might be interred together. I was quite willing to do so; no amount of respect that I could pay my dead father appeared too great to me, and I believed that what I had consented to he would have wished himself. It was therefore arranged that the funeral *cortége* from Grasslands should set out at a certain hour for Wiversdale, to be joined there by the other party, and that the burials should take place at the same time, after which the mourners should return first to Wiversdale Manor to hear my grandmother's will read, and thence to Grasslands to listen to that of my father. On the appointed day, everything happened as had been ordered; and my uncle Jabez and myself, as chief mourners, followed the remains of our respective parents to the grave. The combined funerals had attracted a large number of us together, and a

numerous party was afterwards assembled at Wiversdale, the only members of which, specially supporting myself, were my uncle Portsdowne, George Lascelles, Dr. Percivale, and my late father's solicitors. I had not any interest in my grandmother's will; I knew that it did not concern me, and had no wish that it should; for the use of the manor and its belongings had only been bequeathed to her, during her lifetime, and her personal possessions were the only things she had to leave away. Hearing the will read, therefore, was a mere form, until the lawyer came to that part which disposed of her jewelry, and the few hundreds she had laid by since my grandfather's death. My uncle Jabez inherited everything, from the manor and its acres down to the coal-scuttle and the hearth-broom; and the surplus money was left to my unmarried aunts. As I was listlessly hearing the trinkets next particularized, and feeling that I cared nothing if my aunt Anne or my aunt Sarah got the emerald earrings, I was roused by the sound of my own name.

"Mr. Gerald Estcourt," said the lawyer, bowing towards me — Lord Portsdowne touched my arm.

"Eh, what?" I said, starting out of my reverie, with a sigh.

"Your name is mentioned, Gerald."

"*To my grandson, Gerald Estcourt, the Castlemaine diamond ring, with my love*," read the lawyer, deliberately.

"That must be a mistake," exclaimed my uncle William, hurriedly. "Jabez, that ring should be yours, or mine."

"No mistake, sir," said the lawyer, blandly, "the legatee is distinctly stated."

Now, the ring erst-while in my grandmother's possession, and known as the "Castlemaine diamond," was looked upon by the Estcourt family in very much the same light as the English regard the Kohinoor. It was a remarkably large and valuable stone for private property, and had established quite a name for itself in the county. That my grandmother should leave it, or indeed anything, to me, had never entered my head for a moment. I was wonderfully surprised then, and pleased into the bargain. My relations were also wonderfully surprised, but not so much pleased, which made all the difference.

"I dispute the bequest;" continued my uncle William, speaking loudly; "I never heard of such a thing. That's a family jewel, sir: a ring which has been in our possession for centuries, and always descended from son to son. It should have been left to my eldest brother here, or to myself, not to a boy who cannot know the value of it, and will probably make ducks and drakes of it with the rest of his property."

"It is of no use becoming heated about it, Mr. Estcourt," replied the lawyer quietly; "I had the honour of drawing up this will for your late respected mother, and I know that Mr. Gerald Estcourt, and no one else, was intended to become the owner of the Castlemaine diamond. The young gentleman in question, if I mistake not, will in due course be the head of the family, and therefore, for my own part, I can conceive no fitter recipient of the family heirloom. Whatever our separate opinions, however, we have no power to alter this paper," tapping the parchment as he spoke, "which is as succinctly drawn up as any will I ever had to do with."

"It's the only thing he shall take out of this house then," exclaimed my uncle, becoming infuriated by the lawyer's complacency, "and that I'll swear. My eldest brother is not one to be cajoled and deceived into leaving away his possessions from his lawful heirs to any upstart who may think it worth his while to wheedle himself at the last moment into his good graces —"

"William, hold your tongue," growled my uncle Jabez, who had witnessed this scene with apparently the most perfect indifference. As the former proceeded with his address, I rose to my feet, preparatory to answering his charges, but Lord Portsdowne whispered to me to keep silence.

"Throw his dirty ring back in his face, Gerald, and let the matter be; it's not worth the owner of Grasslands disputing about." But it was not the ring I cared for, my possession of which was safe enough; it was my character for open dealing which was in danger.

"I am not aware to whom you allude, Mr. Estcourt," I said, advancing into the centre of the room, "when you speak of 'upstarts' wheedling themselves into your mother's good graces at the last moment; you cannot certainly mean myself, for every one here knows that instead of doing too much to win my grandmother's favour, I did perhaps too little; and the fact of her remembering me in her will is scarcely less startling to me than that the bequest should have been accompanied with her 'love.' My uncle, Lord Portsdowne, advises me to refuse the legacy, since it gives such evident dissatisfaction to the rest of the family, but I do not feel disposed to take his counsel. I am a man now, and able to judge for myself; and my own

opinion is, that my grandmother showed her good sense in leaving it to me, and that the Castlemaine diamond will be more appropriate on the finger of the future Mrs. Gerald Estcourt than on that of any other lady of the family."

So saying, I resumed my seat, and the lawyer proceeded to read out the rest of the legacies, which were small but very equally divided. I could not, however, help hearing the various remarks which followed my speech, amongst which, "insolent puppy," from my uncle William, "the impudence of him," from Mrs. Logan, and a prolonged growl from old Jabez were most apparent.

When the reading of the will was concluded, I asked the lawyer at what date the Castlemaine diamond had been bequeathed to me. I thought that it must have been since my father's death, or, at all events, since I had last arrived at Grasslands; but to my astonishment I found that my grandmother's will had been drawn up five years before, and not touched since. At the very period, then, when our disagreements had been most frequent, and I had imagined this strange old woman liked me least, she had settled to leave me her most valuable possession. The thought softened me greatly.

The reading of the will at Grasslands was almost as much a form as it had been at Wiversdale. My father had summed up its contents in the few words he spoke to me on his death-bed; with the exception of ten thousand pounds to Emmeline, whose marriage was not so wealthy as those of her sisters, and an injunction that the allowance he had been used to make Lady Mary should be continued until her death, every-

thing was left unreservedly to me. I had never yet been sufficiently interested to inquire of what income I should eventually become possessed; I now found that, all burthens to the estate complied with, I was the owner of a clear three thousand a year, the rest of my father's annual expenditure having been defrayed by the proceeds of his writing.

But three thousand a year, backed by such a place as Grasslands, was no mean heritage for a young fellow of my age to come into. Lord Portsdowne said something to this effect as, the rest of my uncles having taken their departure, he kindly congratulated me on my prospects. I listened patiently until he had finished his harangue, and then my eyes went wearily round the empty room, and I seemed to feel for the first time that *his* presence could never fill it more.

"I would give it all," I exclaimed, passionately, "a thousand, thousand times over, to hear *his* voice once again." I attempted to leave the room with dry eyes as I spoke, but my uncle's kind hand was placed upon my shoulder, and I sat down at the table and cried like a child instead.

CHAPTER XVI.

In another week Grasslands was shut up again. My sisters had hurried away for change of scene, Lord Portsdowne and George Lascelles had returned to London, and I was on my way to Guildford. A clumsy ugly hatchment frowned from the front of the hall; the chief apartments were locked up; the shutters closed; and the old place left to as deep repose as was its late master in the vault at Wiversdale.

I arrived at Guildford late in the afternoon. The town, never a lively one, looked more cheerless than ever; the leaves were already stripped off the few trees which adorned its environs, and a steady rain had been falling for some days. The stuccoed front of the terrace where my mother still lived was green and black from the damp and the smoke; and as I came in sight of it again, I thought I had never seen a more melancholy-looking place. Lady Mary and Miss Estcourt were not at home, so the servant who opened the door informed me. I was surprised at the intelligence, for I had given them ample notice of my arrival; but poor Marguerite was always to be seen, and in another minute I was seated by her side. This patient sister of mine had not improved in health during the last few years; on the contrary, the spinal weakness from which she suffered had greatly increased, but she had grown so used to a recumbent position that her spirits were more equable than they had been when she was

first laid upon her back. Our meeting was necessarily a sad one, for Marguerite was an affectionate girl, and the fact of her never having seen her father since she could remember him, appeared, instead of lessening, to have rather aggravated her distress at the news of his death.

"If I had only known him, Gerald, for ever so short a time," she exclaimed, weeping — "if I had the slightest memory of his face, by which I think of him, I should be so thankful; but when I attempt to recall his features it is all a blank, and I can't help fancying that when we meet again we shall not know each other."

I combated this idea as well as I could, and told her what her father had said on his death-bed, respecting his wish to see her and Lilias before he died.

"But I don't see how you could have gone to him, my dear girl," I continued, "even had the message reached you. By the way, I must make some inquiries about that telegram whilst I am here; there must have been gross carelessness somewhere, for my mother never to have received it. I know that there was no mistake on the Dorsetshire side."

Marguerite coloured a good deal whilst I was speaking, and the circumstance directed my attention to herself. She was lying on the sofa, fully robed, and on observing more closely, I saw that the material of which her dress was composed, although black, was of a very ordinary texture, and totally untrimmed by crape or any of the outward signs of deep mourning.

"This is surely very slight mourning for the occasion, Marguerite," I said, touching the folds of her skirt. I was, of course, dressed in the deepest myself;

and although I was aware that black crape and bombazine are often adopted by those who have no sorrow in their hearts, so long as the custom is an acknowledged one in society the neglect of it must imply a certain want of respect to the deceased. My sister blushed still deeper, and said that she thought it was. "But I am not able to look after such things myself, dear Gerald, as you know, and am obliged to wear whatever mamma thinks fit to buy me. I remonstrated with her, but it was of no use. She said it would be absurd of me to load my dress with crape for a person I had never seen, and I had no choice in the matter."

"And do Lilias and my mother permit the same objection to apply to themselves?" I asked, "for there might be some excuse for you, Marguerite, since you never go out."

"Lily's dress is the fac-simile of mine," she replied; "and as for mamma's, why, you'll see it, Gerald, presently, and then you can judge for yourself."

"Lilias, at all events, is old enough, and able to follow her own inclination," I said, warmly.

"Lilias is led in everything by mamma," replied Marguerite.

"Marguerite, tell me," I exclaimed, as a sudden suspicion struck my mind, "did that telegram ever reach my mother?"

"Oh! ask her yourself, Gerald, pray don't ask me; it is all so miserable and so wretched; I cannot bear to think of it."

I refrained from further questioning, as she desired me; but her evasion raised some very bitter thoughts in my heart, and as I heard my mother's footsteps in the hall, I rose to my feet, with a stern

determination, should my suspicions prove correct, to tell her what I thought of her behaviour. She entered the room, accompanied by Lilias, and saluted me in the most off-hand manner, as if nothing unpleasant had occurred since we had last met, or rather as though we had parted the day before, and had only to relate the adventures of the intervening twelve hours to one another. I saw at a glance that both she and my sister had on dresses and mantles which might have passed for ordinary costume, that Lady Mary wore no widow's cap, and that white flowers mingled with the black net and silk of which Lilias' bonnet was composed. I stood by Marguerite's sofa, biting my lips and regarding my mother with marked displeasure in my countenance, as she advanced to greet me, saying carelessly —

"What, my dear Gerald; you here already? Lily and I made sure we should be home in time to welcome you; however, I suppose Marguerite has been doing her best to amuse you."

"I was not likely, mother," I said, as I coldly returned her kiss, "to expect or to wish for much amusement, coming straight as I have from the scene of so great a bereavement as my father's death has been to me; but I confess you might have prepared a better welcome for me than the sight of so much disrespect paid to his memory."

"Disrespect paid to your father's memory, Gerald! what are you talking about?" she asked, sharply; whilst Lilias, turning towards me, appeared quite ready to engage in an argument on the subject, and poor Marguerite, with burning cheeks, cast her eyes down upon her lap.

"I am talking about what I *see*," I answered, firmly. "Mother, I know very little about ladies' dresses, and such things; but however slight my experience, it has been sufficient to teach me that few people would guess from your appearance, and that of my sisters, that you had just lost a husband and they a father."

Lady Mary looked perfectly conscious of the meaning of my address; but the only effect it produced was to cause a rapid hardening of her eyes and mouth; and when she adopted this expression, I knew of old that some remark deteriorating to my father's character was sure to follow.

"Can you say with truth, Gerald," she commenced, in her most icy tones, "that I *have* lost a husband or my daughters a father? You were an infant in arms when I left Grasslands, and you are now of age. During all that time we have neither known nor seen the person whom you mention. His death makes no difference to us either way, excepting that the Lord has mercifully lifted a very heavy yoke from off my shoulders." And my mother finished her sentence with a deep sigh.

"But it was by your own desire that you separated from him," I rejoined, quickly. "If I have understood my uncle Portsdowne rightly, whoever was the first to propose a separation, you were the one most eager to adopt and carry out the plan. He has told me more than once that it was not only his wish, but even my father's, that you and he should come to some sort of compromise in the matter; but that, the idea once started, you never lost a moment until the whole business was completed."

At this Lady Mary became very angry.

"My brother Portsdowne had no right to discuss the matter with such a boy as you are, still less to enlighten you as to his private opinions. I consider he is greatly to blame, and I shall take an early opportunity of telling him so."

"That must be as you please, mother," I replied; "but it has nothing to do with the question in hand. I left my three elder sisters dressed as I am myself, in the deepest mourning; I come here to find Lilias and Marguerite robed in ordinary black dresses, and yourself without even the mark of your widowhood. Your feelings on the subject you cannot prevent; but for the neglect of an outward form there can be no excuse, and I consider your present behaviour scarcely decent."

A dead silence followed this speech: I had expressed myself without warmth, but with great determination, for I felt indignant, remembering the kindness with which my father had spoken of these women on his death-bed, to find that they were even putting themselves to trouble in order to show their indifference to what had been so great a loss to myself. My mother and sister were about to take this opportunity to leave the room, but I detained them.

"Whilst we are on this subject," I said, "let us have done with it. Mother, did you ever receive the telegram which I sent you from Grasslands?"

"The telegram on the first occasion of your father's danger?" she inquired.

"Yes; what other? the message which told you of his approaching death and desire to see you. Did it reach Guildford?"

"It did, Gerald."

"You got that message, mother, and you never came?"

"I got that message, Gerald, and I never came. It may be all very well, when a man has behaved for twenty years with systematic cruelty to the woman whom he made his wife, for him to wish to patch up a reconciliation, as a salve to his conscience, when he knows himself to be dying; but you must excuse me if I say that I have no faith in the sincerity of a desire which has been so long delayed. A few words are easily spoken, but they can have no power to obliterate the memory of years of coldness. I might have gone to Grasslands, and taken up my station at your father's bedside; but I should have been no more his widow in feeling for that act than I am now. I could not conscientiously have said that I had any pleasure in meeting him again. I trust I have forgiven the injuries I have received from him and his people; but I have not forgotten them, and it is not in human nature to suppose that I should."

"God forgive you!" I exclaimed, passionately. "And that man spoke as kindly of you on his dying bed as he could have done; sent you his forgiveness, trusted he had yours, and spoke with hope of meeting you again where there should be nothing but peace between you."

Lady Mary smiled in a wintry manner, and shook her head as if there was little chance of my poor father gaining the same rest to which her long-suffering purity entitled her.

"I trust it may be so, Gerald; though I have little

faith, as I told you before, in a death-bed repentance. 'Through much tribulation' we inherit the kingdom."

"I expect there are some of us who will never inherit it at all," I exclaimed, bluntly; "and my Bible reading has taught me that we are none the safer for making so sure upon the subject."

"I shall not argue the matter with you, Gerald," replied my mother, sternly. "You received good training whilst you were under my care; but you have been now, for many years past, removed from my influence, and I do not expect that you will be brought back into the fold, except as through fire. Till that blessed event happens there can be no sympathy between you and me on matters which concern the soul."

"My object in coming down to Guildford," I said, taking no notice of the gauntlet she had thrown down, "was to consult with you on your future prospects. By my late father's will you are entitled to continue to receive the allowance he made for you for the remainder of your lifetime; and it was his desire (a desire with which I trust, mother, notwithstanding your thankfulness for your release, that you will, for my sake and my sisters', comply) that you should henceforward take up your residence at Grasslands. I am amply otherwise provided for, and in carrying out his wishes you will be acceding to my own. It is with the intention of settling this business with you that I am here."

At this proposal Lady Mary turned positively white with rage.

"Live at Grasslands!" she exclaimed; "return to the place from which I was expelled, which ought by right to have been left to me, as a pensioner on *your*

bounty; permit my daughters to be patronised by the people who took pains to be insolent to myself! This is indeed the last drop in the cup. If things were as they should have been, Gerald, everything in that establishment would have been left to me, at all events until my death; and I should have been laid under obligation to no one; as it is —"

"As it is, mother, they are as good as left to you; my father's wish was that you should enjoy Grasslands and all its belongings for the rest of your lifetime, and you need not be afraid that I shall ever remind you that you are keeping me out of my property."

"It is no such thing," she answered, rudely. "Such an arrangement is only another instance of your father's wish to insult me; and you must be mad to have consented to be the bearer of such a message. Do you imagine that I would subject myself to meeting again *your* uncles and aunts" (since I had been regarded by my mother in the light of my father's son the whole burden of the family was invariably laid upon my shoulders) "with the memory of their former insults fresh in my mind?"

"Fresh after a lapse of twenty years?" I replied. "You must have a retentive mind for others' trespasses, mother. My father was sixty-five, and you are but a few years younger. Is it worth while to cherish enmity when we have so short a time in which to indulge it? You have always told me that my grandmother was your bitterest enemy; she, at all events, is gone, and during the last months of her life expressed no ill-feeling against yourself, as I can testify; and I begin to think now that much of what you conceived to

be especial spite was due to the roughness of her character."

I then detailed the story of Mrs. Estcourt's will, and the fact of her having left me the celebrated Castlemaine diamond five years before. "And I shall always value it," I continued, "less for its intrinsic worth than for the insight which the reception of it has given me into the feelings which my poor old grandmother evidently cherished in my behalf."

Lady Mary burst into tears of rage.

"*Go on*," she said, witheringly, between her breath-catching sobs. "Go on, Gerald. Extol your grandmother to the skies! Of course she was everything that is delightful! *I* have never loved you or taken care of you; *I* have not watched over you, and prayed to God for your welfare night and morning. Your mother is *nothing;* she has no grand houses and estates to leave you; no money, wherewith to indulge your body to the detriment of your soul; no *diamond rings*" (my mother almost ground her teeth over these words) "to bequeath, whereby you may remember the feelings she has cherished for you." And here Lady Mary's sobs choked her further utterance.

"This is perfectly absurd!" I exclaimed. Young men, and indeed men of all ages, have seldom much sympathy with a woman's tearful reproaches, particularly reproaches that are mixed with so much sarcasm and so little sense, and my indignation against my mother's present conduct and opinions was very great; but my former affection for her, although wearied by her constant appeals to it, had not all died out, and I knew that, however great her injustice, her trials had been of adequate proportion. Some thought of this

kind flashed through my mind now, and prevented me from answering her as harshly as I might otherwise have done.

"You know as well as I do, mother, that the difference between your circumstances and those of my father or grandmother has never made the least difference in my love for you. You can scarcely have thought how great an insult you offer to my capacity for right feeling by the supposition, or you would surely never have made it. The separation between our parents has been fraught with miserable consequences to all of us; not the least of which, to myself, is the fact that as soon as my father commenced to love me, you ceased to do so. But you cannot accuse me of having inherited the fickleness of your disposition: as far as in me lay I have always tried to love and do my duty to you both; and if your jealousy was so great that you would not accept a divided affection, that was not my fault. All earthly rivalry is now over between you; as far as you are concerned your son belongs to you only; but if we are to renew, and to continue, on terms of peace with one another, it must be on the understanding that all honour is paid, in my presence, to my father's memory, both by word, deed, and insinuation. I tell you now frankly, what during his lifetime I hardly dared to say, that I loved my father from the bottom of my heart, and that I shall always cherish the remembrance of his goodness to me as one of the greatest blessings I have received at the hands of heaven."

I think my mother was considerably struck by the firmness with which I spoke, and perhaps she admired the boldness my words displayed, for she ceased her

wailing and m de me a very calm and sensible reply. But all my endeavours to persuade her to agree to her late husband's wish by living at Grasslands proved unavailing. She stoutly refused to go near, or have anything to do with the place; and when I put it on the plea of looking after the house for myself, she advised me to ask Emmeline and Colonel Talbot to accept the charge.

"Your sister has not the same unpleasant recollections connected with it which would make Grasslands hateful to me. Since you wish it, Gerald, we will in future avoid all discussions of, or reference to, the doings of your late father, but you must, on your part, cease trying to persuade me even to look again on a spot where I have been so miserable."

"But surely you will not remain in Guildford, mother," I said; "it is a wretchedly dull place for the girls; and you will all be the better for a change." At this my sisters looked up eagerly; it was evident that my proposal met with their approbation.

(Here I must digress for a moment in order to relate that Lilias' engagement to the round-faced curate, who was of strictly evangelical principles, had been brought to an abrupt conclusion the year before, by his marrying a round-faced cousin of his own, for whom it appeared he had always entertained a sneaking affection, and the proposed match having been one that my father totally disapproved of, he had not thought fit to take any steps to resent the affront offered to our family. Since which event my sister and mother had rushed from the lowest depths of one extreme to the most giddy heights of the other; and from having been scandalised at the sight of a cross or the mention of a candle,

were now stanch observers of all the ceremonies of the Ritualistic service.)

This being the case, no obstacle existed to their leaving Guildford, and Lady Mary seemed to be of my opinion.

"I have thought of it, Gerald," she replied, "more than once; and if Marguerite had been fit to travel, Lilias and I would have liked to have gone abroad for a short time; but we have as yet decided nothing. It is, however, pretty certain that we shall leave Guildford. What are your own intentions?"

A plan for poor Marguerite's benefit flashed through my mind whilst my mother was speaking; but I said nothing of it on that occasion. I told her that in accordance with my father's expressed desire, I had already sent in my resignation of the service, and that I intended to spend the next few years in travelling, preparatory to settling down to a literary life. It had always been the path chalked out for me, and the success of the "Quarry of Fate" had decided me to adopt it. My mother thoroughly disliked the army; but she pretended to hold the profession of literature in the greatest contempt.

"I had rather," she exclaimed, "that you had chosen to be anything than an author. The only point on which the late Mrs. Estcourt and I ever agreed was in contemning the waste of time necessarily involved in the production of frivolous tales and romances. Oh, Gerald! I wish that you would turn your thoughts towards our holy church."

I reminded her that to write was not, of necessity, to produce trash; that even novels, which carried any weight with them, were capable of influencing mankind;

and that I was not careless enough to enter holy orders without a decided tendency towards the vocation. Still, the mere fact of my wishing to follow my father's profession (simply because it *was* his) was gall and wormwood to Lady Mary; and her prejudices being too strong and too unreasonable to be battled with successfully, I abandoned all attempt to do so during the short time I spent at Guildford.

If the character of my mother appears inconsistent to such as may remember how much more forbearing she at one period seemed towards my father and the treatment she had received from him, I can only urge, in answer to the objection, that inconsistency is the most human of failings, and that the heroine who is systematically virtuous is as unnatural a creation as the villain who systematically errs. If no one in this world is perfect, it is equally true that no one is entirely bad, and that, as the very best have their faults, so surely do the very worst possess some loveable qualities.

My mother's strong point was her love for her children, and jealousy, the vice which almost trampled the virtue under foot. My father was capable of conceiving and inspiring a warm, frank affection, but his obstinacy too often prevented such feeling having fair play. During his lifetime, my mother's pride, and perhaps her cowardice, forbad her saying all she thought about him; for her reticence, since it did not prompt her to avowed forgiveness, could have sprung from no worthier motive. He, on the contrary, steadfastly opposed during his prosperity to even hearing the mention of her name, relented as soon as he felt that his opportunities for re-

conciliation were slipping away from him, and wished nothing better than to die friends with her.

Which character was the most loveable, or which the worthiest of love, I leave my readers to determine. Perhaps, being so widely opposite, they were not equally responsible for the effect which circumstances had upon them. "*Non nostrum tantas componere lites.*"

I left Guildford with the fixed idea of asking Colonel Talbot and Emmeline to reside at Grasslands during my absence from England; and Lady Mary to allow Marguerite to stay there with them. I saw that the girl was not happy under present circumstances, and that the proposed plan would leave my mother and Lilias at liberty to carry out their wish to go abroad.

Strange to say, all turned out as I desired.

Colonel Talbot had had enough of knocking about to last him his lifetime, and, as soon as he heard of my father's legacy to Emmeline, had determined to retire on half-pay. They were, therefore, only too pleased to consent to occupy Grasslands for me; and Emmeline was delighted with the prospect of having Marguerite for a companion.

When it was made known to that poor girl that her sister not only wished to have her, but that Lady Mary had consented that she should go, she was nearly beside herself with gratitude to me and pleasure in her new prospects; and before I left England I had the satisfaction of seeing her comfortably settled under Emmeline's wing, and delighted with the novel occupation of teaching little Ethel how to read and write.

My mother then got rid of the house and furniture at Guildford, and prepared, with Lilias, to take up her

residence in Paris. She was very desirous that I should live with them there, but this I declined. I had no objection to accompany them to their destination, and see them safely at their journey's end, but I had no wish to settle down in a city, or, indeed, anywhere, for some time to come. I had felt the events of the last few months more than I cared to acknowledge, and I wanted a complete change. I wanted to leave everything that worried me behind; even the recollection, if such was possible, of what had given me pain. And this was not to be effected whilst I moved in the same circle, seeing the old familiar faces, hearing the old familiar voices. I had my mind to enlarge, too; to stretch with new sights and new thoughts; to improve by study and by practice; to render worthy, in fact, to take up the thread of my father's fame, where death had cut it short, and, if possible, add lustre to it. As I thought of this, my eye would brighten, my breast swell, and myself feel that I had been singled out by fate for the pursuance of a high and lofty duty. My resignation of the army having been accepted, I left England, full of noble aspirations, and determined to fulfil them to the utmost. It is so easy to plan and to resolve, so hard to continue and to do!

CHAPTER XVII.

"*It is difficult for a man to speak long of himself without vanity; therefore I will be short.*" Such are the opening words of Hume's brief autobiography, which altogether occupies but a few pages.

I endorse the sentiment and wish that I could follow the example. Feeling how hard it is to keep egotism in the background, and yet in justice to myself to relate such circumstances as may palliate the follies of my life, I have already been tempted, more than once, to throw down my pen in disgust; and would have done so, had it not been for the thought that I assumed the office of historian less to transcribe the events of my own matter-of-fact career, than to do honour to the character of one whose virtues set her as far above the level of mankind as I myself am beneath it. Keeping this end in view, I take heart to proceed.

I was away from England for two years. For two years I wandered about in strange places, never staying anywhere long, although I visited many of them more than once. After leaving my mother and Lilias in Paris I went on to Germany, Switzerland, and Italy, crossing into Spain and Portugal, and lingering in these sunny lands for some months at a time. I did not often travel alone, having generally the good fortune to fall in with some of my countrymen; now with a parcel of riotous boys, "seeing the world" under

the auspices of a tutor, whom they drove nearly frantic in his efforts to keep them together and restrain their wildness; then with an author travelling "on commission," and anticipating his profits; and again with a good old-fashioned British family, the ladies of which kept me fully employed in settling their disputes, making their bargains, and stowing away in my unfortunate valise the purchases which they could not get into their own boxes.

At one period George Lascelles joined me, and we journeyed for many a league together; and a season, long to be remembered (less I fear for its steadiness than its charms), was spent by Jack Lascelles (who was still my boon companion and dearest friend) and myself in Paris. But during all this time I was not exactly idle. I carried a note book with me wherever I went, and I let little escape my notice.

I believe the only two things which I did *not* do, were the ascent of Mont Blanc, and making acquaintance with the German gaming-tables.

Both experiences I knew to be considered orthodox for the young Englishman abroad, but perhaps my tastes were peculiar. The first feat had been attempted too often, and accomplished too seldom to prove a temptation to me; added to which, those who had tried it, successfully or otherwise, had talked so much on the subject that they had drained it of all novelty: and to abstain from the second phase of "fast life" (which might more appropriately be termed "fast death") I considered as part fulfilment of my dying father's injunction not to soil his name.

But at the end of the two years I began to feel home-sick. As far as my own establishment was con-

cerned, I had not much, it is true, to draw me thither, but I longed to see Grasslands again, and my sisters' faces, and to take up my position in the world as my father's son. So I made up my mind to return; abruptly at the last, as was my nature, and bent my steps homewards, taking Paris on my way. There I found my mother and sister, still very comfortable, and apparently without any present intention of moving. I stayed with them a few days, and was astonished at the different tone their conversation had assumed to what I remembered it at Guildford. The vanities of this wicked world appeared to be influencing not only Lady Mary's dress, but her tastes and manners. She was as eager now about society and amusement as she had once been opposed to both; and she was permitting Lilias to receive the attentions of a certain Mons. Le Sage; a gentleman, I allow; a "vicomte," of course, but a Roman Catholic into the bargain; and when I ventured to suggest that a marriage between persons of opposite faith was not likely to be productive of much happiness, my argument was met by as long a string of refutations as my objections to the round-faced curate in the days of old had been. Leaving my mother, therefore, to the pursuance of her new opinions, and my sister to her prospective conjugal bliss with Mons. le Vicomte, I took my departure from Paris, charged with their love and a box of bonbons for Marguerite, but not a word of regret for their lengthy separation, or a wish expressed that they might soon meet again.

I arrived in London about Easter, and the first house I went to was that of Lord Portsdowne, whose family had just come to town for the season. The

welcome I received was as hearty as I could have desired; I found my uncle and aunt but little changed, and my cousins, Lady Mary and Lady Cecilia Lascelles, transformed into elegant, fashionable women, but not too much so to object to my resuming the brotherly terms upon which I had met them from the time I was a boy.

Before I had been there ten minutes,

"Sit down, Gerald," exclaimed my uncle, pointing to a chair contiguous to his own, "and tell me exactly what you wish — hope — and intend to do. Of course you will keep on the house in Brook Street."

The residence in question had been taken on a lease of twenty-one years, more than half of which time had still to run. It had been let during my absence, but was again vacant, and after a short visit to Grasslands, I intended to return to London and superintend its being put in order for my reception.

"If I am to write," I said, "I must have a house to myself; and as long as the Talbots will consent to look after Grasslands for me I shall live chiefly in town. I should not like to let the old place to strangers, but I could not reign there in solitary grandeur."

"I suppose you know that Mr. Jabez Estcourt has sold Wiversdale."

"Has he indeed? what did it fetch?"

"One hundred thousand; a long price, but it was worth it. Hawkins, the great City grocer, purchased, and has doubtless decorated it after his own taste. But I was surprised at your uncle not settling there himself, particularly as the name of Estcourt has long ranked with those of the county families."

"It is a pity," I observed; "but I suppose the country is too dull to suit his ideas, and he has taken up a gorgeous residence nearer town. Where does he live now?"

"In the same little cottage at Richmond," replied Lord Portsdowne, laughing at my astonishment; "there'll be a good lump of money for some one at his death, Gerald, eh? perhaps it will come to you after all, my boy!"

"To *me?*" I exclaimed with unaffected incredulity. "No, uncle, the mountains will be moved into the sea first. But I shall run down to Richmond and visit the old gentleman as soon as I have leisure. There is an honesty about uncle Jabez which I cannot help liking, notwithstanding the crust which envelops his nature. He is certainly not a flatterer, but at the same time, I feel I could trust him never to do a mean or dirty action. His character seems to me like that of my father, without the frank geniality which rendered the latter so universal a favourite, and which a man of the world knows it politic in some measure to display, whether he feels it or not. I think there's a great deal of good hid under my old uncle's crustiness, although perhaps few would believe it."

"There's no accounting for tastes," said Lord Portsdowne shortly.

I slept but one night beneath his hospitable roof, and then I went down to Grasslands, and found all there well and happy. Emmeline had recovered much of her former looks; Marguerite, though no stronger, was beaming with content and good humour, and Talbot, with the aid of my bailiff, had been looking after the farm in first-rate style, and had a long

balance entered to my credit in his formidable ledger. I fancied there was a look of relief on the face of poor Marguerite when I told her there was little chance of Lady Mary returning to England; but she accepted her bonbons with thankfulness, and expressed no regret at their not being accompanied by a letter. My sisters both made great outcry when I announced my intention of living in Brook Street, and declared that it was my bounden duty to stop at Grasslands and look after the calving of the cows and the ploughing of the turnip-fields; but I replied that they had done all that so admirably for me that I could not think of taking it out of their hands just yet.

"But don't flatter yourself that you will have got rid of me altogether, Emmy," I continued, "when I leave this for town: for I intend to bear down upon you at all sorts of times; whenever I want a breath of fresh air, in fact; and as soon as the season is over, you may expect to see me for three months at least."

They were good enough to say that they should anticipate nothing more than the close of the season, and so I left them and stayed with the Lyndons in Curzon Street until my own house was ready for me.

Time appeared to have had no effect whatever upon my sister Gertrude, unless, indeed, in rendering her prettier and more charming than ever. She was one of those little graceful women with piquant faces who never look matronly, but flit about like girls until at some remote period age drops suddenly on them, and steadies them into placid unwrinkled old ladies. She had a nursery full of waxen little dolls, whom she dressed very nicely and kissed very much, but affection for whom never kept her giddy self from one

drive in the Park or evening at the Opera. Gertrude was, in fact, a most thorough flirt; but withal so open and free from any intention of evil, that I, although her brother, felt no right to blame her, particularly as her husband appeared to approve of all her goings on. My brother-in-law, Horace Lyndon, was a quiet, good-tempered fellow, not wanting in sense, but a very different stamp of man from his vivacious brothers, and his wife's multifarious flirtations seemed rather a source of amusement to him than otherwise.

"I wouldn't be an unfortunate boy like that poor young Henderson," he said to me one day, "to come under the battery of Gerty's glances during my first season for anything. She'll drag him about after her for a couple of months like a puppy with a chain, and when she meets him next year she'll have forgotten all about him in company with a dozen others. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Don't you think that Gertrude is rather thoughtless?" I remarked to my uncle shortly afterwards. "If I had a wife, I shouldn't like her to appear day after day in company with the same men, as she does. I know she means no harm, but I am surprised Lyndon does not object to it."

"My dear Gerald," he replied, "*there's safety in numbers;* always remember that. People are very apt to judge with harshness the woman who flirts promiscuously; but they only evince their ignorance of human nature by doing so. If a husband wants cause for being jealous, let him look behind his doors and in his coal-cellars, not among the men who lean over his wife in his presence and tell her she is the most charming creature they ever met. My son is a sensible fellow,

who will never ruin his domestic happiness for a mere puff of wind, and Gertrude is too wise a girl not to appreciate his goodness. I am not in the least afraid for my daughter-in-law, so don't you take alarm for your sister. Depend upon it, Lyndon is quite able to take care of her and himself too."

Before I had taken possession of the house in Brook Street, decided of what servants my establishment should be composed, and settled myself in my father's vacant chair, Beatrice arrived in town for the season, and Jack Lascelles met at their father's for the same purpose. Thus I was surrounded by all my own friends, and launched at once into a course of gaiety from which I should have found it very difficult to extricate myself. I had intended, as soon as I was again settled in England, to apply myself seriously to my writing. I had collected all the materials for my novel, sketched out the plot, decided on the situations, and had nothing to do but to compose the story. But to steadily pursue a sedentary occupation on my first reappearance in town was a harder task than I had calculated upon. However great my own desire, my friends would not permit me to sit still for an hour at a time.

I had scarcely settled myself to my work perhaps, reckoning on a clear afternoon, when I would hear the sound of the hall bell, followed by either the announcement that visitors awaited me in the drawing-room, or the noisy footsteps of Jack or George as they flew upstairs to drag me by main force from my sanctum, and insist upon my accompanying them wherever their restless spirits dictated. At last I gave up the attempt in despair, and decided that "the season" was *not* the

time for writing, especially the first season which I had spent in England for years.

"Of course not, old boy!" as Jack remarked, when I confided my difficulty to him. "The season's the time for dinners and '*wines*' — and, by-the-bye, when are you going to give us another?"

I had not been long in Brook Street before my little dinners and suppers began to be noted amongst the bachelors of my acquaintance, and I had acquaintances of all sorts. Old friends of my father's came to see me continually, and made me welcome amongst them in a manner which I felt bound to repay; members of my family also, having apparently dropped the recollection of any little disagreement which may have existed between us (an event which gave me no less pleasure than surprise), reminded me of their existence by calling in Brook Street, and congratulating me on my return to England. Amongst the latter, astonishment one day almost startled me out of my civility, as I recognized Thomas Logan; but his manner was so cordial, that I could not, without direct rudeness, have refused to ignore the untoward circumstances under which we parted. His presence could never be productive of other than unpleasant recollections to me; but when I asked him to dinner, in company with Joshua Estcourt and several others, he accepted the invitation so eagerly that I began to think that perhaps I had, after all, misjudged him. I found that he was living with his family at Sydenham, and before we parted, he asked me to visit them there. "If ever you want a puff of fresh air, you know, Estcourt, there you have it, and my mother will always give you a shake-down if you like to come. Don't forget the ad-

dress, — Madeline Villa, Percival Road, Sydenham, — dinner at six, — and any day that suits yourself will be convenient to us."

If this proffer of friendship on the part of Thomas Logan surprised me, what must I have felt upon reaching home, one afternoon, to hear that Mrs. Logan awaited me in the drawing-room. The thought of my aunt Anne had prevented me from acceding at once to my cousin's proposal, for I could not forget the words in which she had spoken of my father and myself; yet here she was patiently resting upon one of my easy-chairs until I should be pleased to make my appearance; and if not transformed into a very affectionate aunt, at least much changed from what she had been.

"I have come to scold you," she said, as I shook hands with her, "for not having done as Tom asked you, and been to see us at Sydenham. Your sisters, Gerald, are such *very fine* ladies that I can hardly expect them to do me the honour of a call; but as your name is Estcourt, and you have not yet married into the aristocracy, perhaps you will not carry your head too high to acknowledge your father's nearest relations."

I assured her of what was true, that it had never been my wish to do so; and that if a want of cordiality existed on either side, it had certainly not originated with our branch of the family. I believed that my sisters held aloof from their relatives simply because their company never appeared welcome to them, and that they only required an assurance that it was so, to be ready, not only to visit at their houses, but to receive them at their own. I spoke quietly, but I could not evince much interest in the subject because it so

little affected me. I was willing to bury the hatchet, and pass over all that had gone before, but I could not pretend to myself that I had forgotten it: if the insults had been levelled at me, instead of my father and mother, the case might have been different. Mrs. Logan sniffed in her old manner as I concluded, and changed the subject by commenting upon the furniture and fitting-up of the apartment.

"There is surely a smell of tobacco here, Gerald!" she said, using her nose for the purpose of detection; "but I hope you don't permit smoking to go on with those beautiful curtains."

I laughed, and said that I was afraid my friends did just what they pleased in my apartments, and were not much in the habit of taking the beauty of my curtains, or any other article in my possession, into consideration. Mine was quite a bachelor's establishment. I was not used to the honour of a lady's presence in my room, or the knowledge might make us all more careful. I feared I had no untainted apartment into which to ask her, but I trusted she would excuse the fact, and in future I must be the one to pay my *devoirs* at Sydenham. This I said, hoping it would be a hint to her not to intrude upon my privacy again. But she appeared impervious to a suggestion.

"Oh! I don't mind it," she replied. "I was thinking of the furniture, Gerald, not of myself: and very far from keeping me away from Brook Street, I dare say I shall often pop in upon you about luncheon time. When business brings me up to town, it is generally to the West End; and I find it so convenient to have a friend to go to, and particularly in such a central

situation. Have you lunched yet? What's your usual hour?"

"I never took luncheon myself, but, of course, I told my aunt that she could always have it at any hour she chose; and as business afterwards appeared to bring her up to London pretty often, I had quite as much of her company as I desired. It is true that I did not always force myself to join her midday meal: sometimes I was engaged when she "popped" in upon me; sometimes, being a lazy fellow, not out of bed; but my presence or absence seemed to make no difference to my aunt Anne. She always made very good use of the permission I had extended her, and from all accounts appeared to enjoy an excellent appetite.

The rest of my family flocked about me, the younger members especially, and I both entertained, and was entertained by, their fathers and mothers. My uncle William and Mr. Logan were the only two who kept aloof from me. Of these, one was openly quarrelsome, the other silently sulky. I met the former at the table of my uncle Jabez, and encountered so much insolence at his hands that I told him publicly that I would never sit down to dinner with him again, at which outburst his elder brother grunted, but expressed no sign of either disapprobation or approval, although he continued to send me an occasional invitation to his cottage at Richmond; the moods of the latter, on the contrary, were beneath my notice, further than by keeping me away from Sydenham, as they did. This, then, was the condition in which I now found myself with respect to my relations. I never felt much in my element when mixing with them; they were not to me

like the Lascelles and my immediate friends; but we were always friendly and social upon meeting, and I did not stop to inquire whether they or myself derived most benefit from the intercourse. My sisters laughed, and prophesied that their new regard was not quite disinterested, and would last just as long as was convenient to themselves, an opinion which I was always ready to meet with a lengthy dissertation on the folly and wickedness of trying to keep up dissension between persons so nearly connected by blood. I was conceited enough to believe that my father's family had really discovered something in myself to conquer their uncalled-for dislike; simple enough never to suspect that my improved condition and increased influence were at the bottom of their unsought proffers of friendship, and that the same jealousy they had displayed towards their lucky brother was smouldering beneath the honey of their words to me, and only requiring an occasion to light up into a flame. The social position which I now occupied was undoubtedly a good one. I was a member of three of the best clubs in London, hand in glove with many young men of the highest families, the possessor of a very pretty stable, and of an uncommonly good cellar. I made my cousins welcome to a share of all my good things; they borrowed my horses, drank my wine, and made use of my purse whenever they had cause for doing so, and I acceded to their requests, glad of an opportunity to lay them under an obligation which should make them feel the close connection between us. Thus, surrounded by flatterers as well as friends, cursed with a long purse, a short age, and a spirit of incorrigible thoughtlessness, I began life on my own account under as great dis-

advantages as a man could. Young fellows with limited allowances or moderate pay are apt to speak of the independent and rich of their acquaintance as "deuced lucky," but it would be more correct were they to reverse their opinion. A necessity for labour is the best heritage a father can leave his son, and a little wealth a most dangerous thing. The command of mine led me, not into extravagance, for my desires were moderate, and it covered them, but into idleness, which is the root of all evil, and left me space to run into every description of folly. Contrary to the experience of most men, I had been kept from much of this abroad, chiefly for the reason that I moved about so rapidly that I had no time to make familiar acquaintance in the towns I passed through. I had been perfectly happy and contented, however, with the life I led, had felt no lack of excitement, and sighed for nothing better; the novelty of foreign travel having kept me from missing the dissipation usual to my age. But now that I had been reintroduced to such scenes, I marvelled that I could have existed away from them so long; that I could have given up, for two whole years, of my own free choice, the delights which awaited me in England. Consequently, I plunged into them headlong. I have no wish to excite feminine interest by writing myself down a desperate rake, at this or any period of my life.

I was not such. I was simply, what all other young men who mix in the world are, thoughtless, ready for any amusement, and fonder of running about by night than by day. I lived in two worlds. One was when I rode in the Park by the side of some highborn creature on horseback, or grazed my animal's

legs against the wheels of a carriage wherein reposed the portly form of a dowager, at whose house I had spent the previous evening, and where I had made my appearance redolent of Ess. Bouquet, in embroidered shirt and infinitesimal necktie, to dance until the small hours with the prettiest girls of the season; or to lean over their chairs at the Opera, and whisper nonsense under cover of the music, whilst they held their fans before their mouths, and turned their eyes upwards as they murmured their half-reproachful, half-approving answers. The other world — when I rushed off, at the conclusion of the aforesaid opera or ball, with companions of similar taste, into an atmosphere which made it of little consequence whether I was scented with one of Rimmel's distillations or the essence of tobacco; and into the presence of women, from whose recognition by daylight I should have fled as from a pestilence.

The incongruity of such an existence used often to strike me forcibly. Holding the hand of some pure girl in the dance; pouring my abominable balderdash into her ears; and receiving, perhaps, some little modest token in return, that proved I was at least not obnoxious to her — the thought would suddenly flash into my mind, what would she think, say, and feel, if she only knew the scenes from which I had freshly come, the conversation I had heard, the company I had mixed with? And the idea would have sufficient power to make me retreat within myself, put an end to my compliments, and perhaps cause a shade of disappointment to steal over the face of my fair partner as she tried in vain to elicit the cause of the change. My male friends had many a hearty laugh at what

they termed my absurd scrupulosity; but though they checked my confidences towards themselves, they never eradicated the opinion from my mind, that a man should belong to one world or to the other; and that, if low company, low haunts, and low conversation are adequate to afford him satisfaction, he has no right to mix amongst those to whom the thought of such scenes alone is contamination. These are new ideas, perhaps, to emanate from a man's pen; I do not say that I acted up to this doctrine; I simply affirm that my heart upheld it, and that the persuasion rendered me less free in the society of well-born women than I should otherwise have been. I never alluded before them to the influence which beauty is supposed to exercise over the rougher portion of mankind, but I felt as if their glances were intended to search into my soul and question why, since their charms possessed so much power, they were not sufficient for my pleasure, and the pleasure of such as myself.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BEATRICE was very anxious that Emmeline should come to town for part of the season; and knowing that she would not care to stay in so gay a house as her own, tried to persuade me to invite her to Brook Street. But this I refused to do. I excused my conduct to my sister on the ground that the presence of a lady in my establishment would prove an obstacle to all my bachelor entertainments, and that I was pledged too deeply to put a stop to them; but my real reason was very different. It would have given me greater uneasiness to see Emmeline accept, for any length of time, the hospitality of either Beatrice or Gertrude, and mix in the continual round of gaiety which was their life.

I had sounded her on the subject; I knew that she was perfectly contented down at Grasslands with her husband and child, and had no wish to enter into the dissipations of which she heard so much. I loved to think of her in her happiness and innocence, engaged in teaching little Ethel, or riding round the farm with Talbot, or reading aloud to Marguerite; and to know that whenever I was sick to death of the turmoil which surrounded me, I had but to run down to Grasslands to breathe a purer atmosphere, physical and moral.

Was it all selfishness in me to wish to keep my sister untainted by the frivolities of a London season; to preserve the freshness of her heart, the simplicity

of her nature, the activity of her love, in its full force?

Emmeline had always appeared to me something better than the rest of us; and not to me only: my father, although he had been as proud as Lucifer of the beauty of the other two, had felt the loss of neither of them so long as she was with him in his sickness; and my mother, however bitter the mention of her titled sons-in-law made her, had never a word to say against this gentlest of her daughters or the husband of her choice. Beatrice and Gertrude were not less pure by nature than their sister; but the education of their maturity had brushed all the bloom from their minds, whilst she retained the guilelessness of hers. Emmeline would have listened with the greatest complacency to a story which would have dyed the cheeks of Beatrice with scarlet, and caused Gertrude to purse up her mouth to a degree of fabulous minuteness, whilst the tell-tale flash from her eyes revealed that she understood the *double entendre* which it was intended to convey. In fact, my elder sisters were women of the world; they had been often deceived where they had trusted, and mistaken where they believed, and the consequence was that, in judging others, they were no longer apt to err upon the softer side. Emmeline had gone almost from the altar to the backwoods, and had never had an opportunity since her marriage of becoming polluted by the society of women worse than herself. For here leaks out the secret of many a pure girl's initiation into the knowledge of wrong. Few men would be base enough to teach it her; they are too soiled themselves not to reverence innocence when they see it; and the first endeavour of a true-hearted

man is to preserve it, even mentally, to the woman he admires; besides, they have not the opportunities of the other sex. It is from women, women who go through society, frequenting the best houses, receiving the most honoured of their sex, shaking hands with the youngest and the purest, but who know only too well that were the secrets of all hearts to be revealed, their path would lie beyond the pale, that our sisters and our daughters receive their most dangerous lessons.

"I hold that man the worst of public foes,
Who, either for his own or children's sakes,
To save his blood from scandal, lets the wife
Whom he knows false abide and rule the house:
For, being through his cowardice allow'd
Her station, taken everywhere for pure,
She like a new disease, unknown to men,
Creeps, no precaution used, among the crowd."

From such companions I was only too glad to think that Emmeline was preserved, and I strenuously opposed all the efforts of her sisters to entice her to take up her temporary residence amongst us. She wrote to me frequently, and every letter proved how perfectly happy she was in her country life, and how circumstances, which most people would have thought trivial, had the power to make her heart well over with innocent pleasure. Now it was that Ethel had had her first riding-lesson on the miniature pony which I had picked up for her, and looked so pretty in her little habit and tasselled cap (photograph in costume enclosed by fond mother), and had not been at all frightened; then, that Marguerite's new invalid chair, by which she could be drawn out into the garden, suited admirably,

and did not jolt her in the least, even over the gravel; anon, because a commission with which Talbot had entrusted me had come to hand, and was "perfect, just what we wanted; and you really are the dearest boy not to mind trouble," &c., &c.

In fact, to please Emmeline it was but necessary to remember other people: however gratified she might appear at receiving a present for herself, it never called forth corresponding thanks. One day she wrote, enclosing a letter which had arrived for me at Grasslands: "a suspicious enclosure," as she impertinently called it, "and not looking at all as if it had come from a gentleman." I took up the forwarded communication and examined it; it certainly *did* look suspicious, being written on thin pink paper with lines running across it, enclosed in a long envelope, and directed in an uncertain female hand. My curiosity was roused to ascertain who could have addressed me at Grasslands, a place from which I had been absent for two years, and to which I had only returned on a flying visit; and my first glance at the inside of the missive helped me little.

"5, *Belleville Crescent*, *Marlborough Circus*, *Islington*."

"Who the devil can live at Belleville Crescent, Marlborough Circus, Islington?" I inwardly ejaculated, and turning to the scratchy signature, I saw transcribed what I took for "A. Shannon." The name was quite unfamiliar to me; but I was used to receiving appeals for the loan of small sums from that half of the creation which no man can refuse; and so I concluded with a sigh, that I was "in" for another five-pound note, and returned to the commencement of the letter.

"*5, Belleville Crescent,*
"*Marlborough Circus, Islington.*

"DEAR SIR,

"Hearing that you have returned to Grasslands, mamma desires me to write, and beg, that if not troubling too much, you will have the goodness to call at the above address, as Mrs. Sherman" ('*Grasslands*, *Sherman*,' I mentally exclaimed, "Good heavens! what can the people want with me?" and then the remembrance of my plantation wooings dawned upon my mind, and I began to laugh so heartily that it was some minutes before I could proceed with the epistle of my fair correspondent) — "as Mrs. Sherman has something of yours by her, and would wish to make a communication respecting it in person. If you should be coming to London shortly, any day will be convenient to mamma as she never goes out, having enjoyed bad health since Mr. Sherman treated her so badly, going to Amerika with all our things and leaving us alone, Adelaide being married some time ago. Hoping this will find you well,

"Yours sincerely,
"J. SHERMAN."

The little Julia, of course; how could I have forgotten her? and yet, when I came to think of it, I had forgotten her entirely. The miserable event which had followed so quickly on my last interview with the family, and the stirring, active life which I had since led, had effectually obliterated all memory of the blue-eyed girls with whom I had frittered away so many half-hours; not only that, but the various scenes of excitement through which I had passed since that time,

and the crowds of pretty women I had seen and made love to, had expurgated all desire to meet my country fascinators again.

My first impulse upon finishing Miss Julia's letter was to take no notice of it: I was not at Grasslands, and she might imagine it had never reached me: but on further consideration I abandoned the idea as unmanly. I was aided to this resolve by the knowledge that the bullet-headed gentleman with the creamy voice had deserted them; if he had been in Belleville Crescent no earthly power should have dragged me there, I disliked the remembrance of him too much; but the thought of the women being alone, and probably in distress, robbed my assent to their request of half the repugnance I felt in the prospect of fulfilling it. Besides, I was curious to know what property of mine could possibly have fallen into Mrs. Sherman's hands, and what she could have to say on the subject which might not be written: these considerations, mingled with a revived recollection of how pretty Julia had been at seventeen, and how, in all probability, she would be much more so at her present age, made me decide to drive over to Islington the first afternoon I could spare time to do so. I had really no feelings connected with the enterprise beyond a little curiosity, and a spark of that chivalry which I trust will never cease to be kindled in my breast at the call of any woman, be her age or station what it may.

At the same time I made no secret of my proposed visit to the men of my acquaintance; there was nothing in Julia Sherman's letter to render showing it a breach of confidence, and I usually produced it, after having given the history of my double flirtation, as evidence of my good faith, challenging my bachelor friends to

do the business for me, and go as my ambassador to Mrs. Sherman's *levée*. Many and many a time did I put off the expedition, my indifference on the subject making me believe that it was really necessary for me to be in the opposite direction; and when at last, some ten days after the receipt of the note, I jumped into my cab with the sole intention of going to Belleville Crescent, I thought it about as great a nuisance as anything that I had ever done. I do not relate my feelings on this matter as any extenuation for the events which followed it: I simply note down what occurred. I am now approaching an epoch in my existence which I would gladly not record; but were I to shirk doing so I should not only be an unfaithful biographer, but in endeavouring to hide some of my faults I should be concealing the only excuse which I have for the committal of others, which, if not worse in themselves, had the most fatal effect upon the happiness of my life. I will attempt to relate this part of my history as briefly as possible; and should any of my readers be inclined to assert that it had been best omitted, I would ask them to suspend their judgment until they have seen how intimately it affected each subsequent action of my life, and trust me that if it had not been absolutely necessary, the story should never have been told.

Belleville Crescent was a row of not bad-looking houses, each of which appeared to be inhabited by several families; for as my cab stopped at No. 3, a monthly nurse (as I saw by the card in the window) popped out her head from the dining-room, three children with dirty faces peered from the area, and a man with lathered chin and razor held in hand glanced over a tumbled blind from one of the top stories. What is

called, in lodging-house parlance, the "drawing-room floor" was the only window unoccupied, and there I concluded I should find the people I was in search of. I was rather nervous as I knocked at the door, lest the surrounding neighbours should suspect me, as they did Pecksniff, of having come post-haste for the monthly nurse, and nearly fell back from the steps when I found that she had answered my summons.

"It's not Mrs. Baines you're wanting, sir?" she inquired, in the mildest of voices, and totally unlike the determined accents of the famous Gamp.

"No; a Mrs. Sherman, — does she live here?"

"On the drawing-room floor, sir; one above this. You had better step up; the lady don't move about much."

I "stepped up" accordingly, and knocked at the door, which was answered by an invitation to enter. When I did so I found Mrs. Sherman alone, extended on a sofa. I have never been able, from that day to this, to ascertain if she was really ill, or only shamming; but I strongly suspect it was a little of the latter mixed with a spice of laziness. She had always been a nerveless, indolent woman, and since the defection of her husband had taken credit for being in too delicate health to make any exertion, and been well satisfied to lie on the sofa all day, and be supported by her daughter. So much I discovered for myself; the rest of their history Mrs. Sherman now related to me. Her tale was a long-drawn-out and pititul one, to which I had to listen with looks of forced interest, and such ejaculatory sentences as "Indeed!" "I am very grieved to hear it!" "How shocking!" "How very sad!" &c., wishing all the while that either the daughter would

make her appearance, or the mother would stop her whining.

But Julia was not at home, and Mrs. Sherman whined on. They had been so comfortably settled at Grasslands, and Mr. Sherman was doing so good a business amongst the surrounding gentry, when one day, without so much as by your leave or with your leave, he had gone away to "the Americas," taking everything of value in the house, "even to the pretty trinkets you gave my dear girls, Mr. Estcourt, and which they valued above everything they possessed."

"And have you never heard from your husband since, Mrs. Sherman?" I inquired.

"*Never*, sir, and I trust I never shall — it's a painful subject — we have reasons to believe that Mr. S. was not quite unaccompanied in his flight" — and here Mrs. Sherman looked down, and fingered the strings of her cap.

I said I was very sorry to hear it, and then an awkward silence ensued, until I remarked —

"And so Adelaide is married, Mrs. Sherman." A faint flush rose to the woman's faded cheek as she answered hesitatingly, "Yes, she is married, Mr. Estcourt."

"Well, I trust."

"Yes, very well. Her gentleman is a wealthy person residing in the country, but I have not seen my daughter now for some time."

"And Julia is with you still?"

"Oh, yes; I couldn't part with Julia. She is employed out during the day in a large millinery establishment at the West End. Nothing ungenteel, Mr. Estcourt; I couldn't allow my daughter to take any but

the genteelest employment. Her only business is in the fitting-on room, where a figure like hers can be turned to advantage. I expect her home shortly; she is generally in by six."

"And your business with me, Mrs. Sherman? We must not forget that, for I am rather pressed for time."

"Oh, you won't refuse to sit a minute, surely, Mr. Estcourt. The last evening we had the pleasure of seeing you in Dorsetshire Terrace" (ay, and the first, too, I thought to myself) "you were so obliging as to commission the late Mr. S. (for I cannot bring myself to speak of that bad man as if he lived) to paint you a picture of the Hall; and he took the greatest of trouble, I believe, to comply with your wishes, but when it was finished you had left England, when of course it could not be sent after you. That picture I have by me now; for his paintings were the only things which Mr. Sherman left behind him, being too bulky, I presume, to be of any use to him. Of course, Mr. Estcourt, you need not purchase the picture unless you choose; still, a commission is a commission, sir, and I think it would hang nicely on your walls at Grasslands. But that is for you to decide."

Of course I said I should be only too happy to pay for the possession of the work of art, and desired Mrs. Sherman to let me know at once how much I was in her debt. She wished me to examine the painting first, but this I felt to be quite unnecessary, particularly as it was packed away in a loft, and could not be procured until Julia came home. All that I wished was to cancel the obligation I was under, and she could send the picture to Brook Street at her convenience. After a good deal of "humming" and "hawing," and

saying she must leave the price to me, and I could give just what I pleased, &c., and that she would have been happy to present me with the painting as a remembrance of Grasslands, if the late Mr. S. had not left Julia and herself to their own resources, Mrs. Sherman settled the knotty question by naming the modest sum of ten pounds for a work which if placed on a signboard had not fetched one, and for which my servant subsequently, on being desired to hang it up in his pantry, almost gave warning. However, ten pounds was not much to me; and before the words had hardly left Mrs. Sherman's lips, a note for that amount was transferred from my purse to hers. She then became so profuse in her thanks that I was meditating instant flight, when a light footstep on the stairs was followed by the entrance of Julia. As I rose to greet her, I was astonished at the improvement in her appearance. She had grown taller and slighter; and the rusticity of her beauty had given place to an air of positive refinement. Her eyes were as blue and as big as ever, her hair as flaxen and luxuriant; and, whether from the heat of the afternoon, or the little excitement consequent on finding me in Belleville Crescent, her cheeks were flushed to the soft tinge of rose-leaves.

She was stylishly dressed also, as became a young "lady" from a West-End millinery establishment, and the attire set off her face as well as her figure. I found her exceedingly shy however; her bashfulness appeared so great that she could hardly answer my inquiries for blushing, and yet she contrived to imbue me with the idea that to meet me again had been the first object of her life. I did not stay long after her ar-

rival, as I had engagements nearer home; but as I gathered up the reins of my cab-horse, rather impatient at the number of strange eyes which were watching my departure, a flutter of the curtain on the drawing-room floor incited me to give another glance upwards, when I caught the eyes of Julia Sherman apparently fixed upon me. As soon as I moved my head, however, she retreated in confusion, and in another minute I was whirling off to the West End. As I recall this part of my life, I turn over the contents of an *escritoire*, and there, amongst faded ribbons, withered flowers, mateless gloves, and old *billets-doux*, I find the following little notes, the first of which reached me two days after my visit to Islington.

"*June 24th.*

"I must write to thank you for your great goodness to us. I did not know it when I met you yesterday, or I should not have been able to hold my tongue quiet. Mamma desires me to say that we send the picture to-day to the address which you left us, and she hopes you will like it. It is just like the *dear* Hall, but I suppose you have forgotten all about that — I mean the time when you and I was there together.

"Yours, sincerely,

"JULIA SHERMAN."

(2.)

"*June 30th.*

"DEAR MR. ESTCOURT,

"You never wrote to say if the picture arrived quite safely — it went by Parcels Delivery. Perhaps you do not wish to write to me now that you are such

a rich gentleman, and such a great difference between us. If so, it would have been best if we had never seen you again. But I dare say you have so many frends that you have no time to think of mamma or me.

"Your affectionate frend,

"JULIA SHERMAN."

To this note I returned a short answer, acknowledging the receipt of the picture, and denying that anything but press of business had prevented my doing so before. By return of post arrived the following:

(3.)

"*July 1st.*

"Why do you write so cold? You used always to call me Juli, and now I am only Miss Sherman. Is it anything I have done or you have heard of me that has changed you? Or is it because papa has behaved so disgraceful to us? Anyway it seems hard to me; I had a good cry over your letter of last night.

"Yours affectionately,

"JULIA."

And a week later: —

(4.)

"*July 8th.*

"I have been expecting a letter from you every day. You are *very* cruel. What has poor Juli done that it is too much trouble even to write to her? Have you forgotten all our walks and talks at Grasslands? I wish I had — but I cannot do it, and I shall never be happy again all my life — I wish I was dead. —

"JULIA."

I had been thinking of writing to her again, until the last note reached me, and then I decided it would be folly to do so. The girl was evidently half educated and wholly foolish; and I should only be the means of dragging us both into a scrape if I pandered to her romantic nonsense. So I was stoically silent under a perfect battery of little love-letters, breathing nothing but reproach, which Julia Sherman fired at me, day after day; until one morning when I received an excited letter from her, entreating me to go to their aid, as the bailiffs had been put into their rooms for debt, and every article of furniture was about to be seized from under them. I went off to Belleville Crescent at once, and released them from their difficulty; and notwithstanding all my virtuous inclinations I cannot say that I was displeased with the effusive demonstrations of gratitude displayed by Julia for my benefit. She clung to me and hung about me in a manner which would have been very delightful for any man, and especially for one who wrote himself down heartwhole.

"You'll come again," she whispered, as I prepared to leave them; "you will not desert us, will you?" and although the very atmosphere of Belleville Crescent was obnoxious to me, I could not but make a half promise to comply with her request. I did not redeem it, however, notwithstanding that the battery of notes was again opened upon me, and their language became more and more unmistakeable.

I was not in the habit of using my own horses at night, and one evening as I turned out of Brook Street about eight o'clock in search of a cab, to my intense surprise I ran up against Julia Sherman, who was loitering on the pavement outside my house.

"Good heavens, Julia!" I exclaimed, "what are you doing here? you're a great deal too pretty, my dear girl, to go about in the evenings by yourself. Who are you waiting for?"

"I was only looking at the house," she answered. "Oh, Mr. Estcourt, you are so unkind to me, you never answer my letters; you are breaking my heart" — and at this juncture she commenced to cry, and there was nothing to be done but to call a cab and take her home. On the way I believe I tried to philosophize a little, and to reason her out of her fancy for me. I know that, however flattered I may have felt by her avowed preference, I thought the whole affair great folly, and foresaw that it might end in trouble for both of us. But there are very few men whose vanity is proof against a woman's confession of love, whether real or feigned. I fear we often are most utterly defeated, when we imagine we have just conquered. I tried to play the Mentor to Julia Sherman; to point out to her how utterly futile it would be for us to love each other; to make her understand (however much the effort cost myself) that on account of my position I should be forced to look elsewhere for a wife. I salved over the harshest parts of my plain speaking, by telling her how flattered I felt by her affection, and how little I was worthy of it; with many other such commonplaces, which if not strictly true I should have been a brute not to make use of. Still, though I spoke out boldly, and meant each word I said, I was not yet four-and-twenty, and it was a hard task for me to feel the girl's arms clinging round me in the shelter of the cab, and to hear her continuous sobbing without attempting some more practical com-

fort than mere words could convey. But so far I take credit to myself; I seemed to foreknow what would eventually come upon us both, and feared to take a single step which should anticipate my fate. So I parted from Julia Sherman with a pressure of the hand, and an assurance, in answer to her whispered entreaty, that nothing had passed but what had raised her in my eyes — God forgive me!

I have promised to be brief, and I will fulfil my word. My philosophical lecture had not the effect upon Miss Sherman that I had anticipated. I continued to meet her, at times and in places when I least expected to do so, and I continued to receive periodically from her pen torrents of reproaches and upbraidings for my cruelty and coldness of heart. Still, I was firm in defending her from the danger which she courted, until one day, regardless of appearance, she rushed into my rooms in Brook Street, clothed in deep mourning, and throwing herself at my feet, declared, amidst sobs, that her mother was dead; her poor dear mother had gone from her for ever; and that she had no money and no credit; and no one to look to but myself in all the world. Shocked at her statements and display of grief, I hastened to raise her from the attitude she had assumed, and assure her of my sympathy and willing aid.

"But what had become of her engagement at the West End," I inquired. The pay which had been sufficient to support two, would of course suffice for one. But Miss Sherman informed me that that was another of her misfortunes. A letter, one of her letters, she said with becoming hesitation, — had been seen

and read, and thereupon she had received a summary dismissal from the head of the establishment.

"It was a note I should not have left about," she added timidly: "I can't think how it happened; it must have dropped from the bosom of my dress: it was — in fact it was yours, Mr. Estcourt, and Miss Grindlay said she would have no one about her place who received letters from gentlemen. And so I lost my situation, and I don't suppose she will give me a character, and — and — I'm ruined by it," she said, relapsing into a fresh burst of tears.

Of course I was indignant; the fact of the mere possession of a letter (and especially a letter of my own, which had been preserved for weeks, and carried next to the heart of its recipient) proving the cause of so summary a dismissal was an unheard-of case. I considered Miss Grindlay's conduct unjustifiable — in fact, infamous. I was for going post-haste to the millinery establishment itself, and engaging in a "round" with its worthy proprietress. But this design Miss Sherman begged me to forego. It would be of no use, she averred, and only the cause of further humiliation to herself. I tried to comfort her with the assurance that situations were not so difficult to procure; that a little influence went a long way; and that I would spare neither money nor pains to get her another. But my proposal did not meet with the approval I anticipated. "I cannot toil on alone," she said plaintively; "it was all very well whilst my dear mother was spared to me; there was some object in working; but now everything is so sadly changed. It is not a week since I buried her, and I have managed, by the sale of our effects, to pay everything she owed, as well as

the funeral expenses; but now that is over I have no heart for any further effort."

I suggested something about her married sister being able to receive her, but she refuted the idea with scorn.

"Adelaide and I have not spoken for ever so long," she said; "I would die sooner than apply to her."

"But how are you to live, Julia?" I asked with unaffected curiosity.

"I don't know," she replied, "and I don't care; go to the workhouse, I suppose, or die in the streets: it will be all one to me, unless, ——" and here she turned her large blue eyes full upon me, — "unless, Mr. Estcourt, you will let me stay here."

Whether it pleased or no, her proposal startled me, and I spent a whole hour trying to reason her out of the idea. I represented to her plainly, how dire the consequences of such a proceeding must prove, not for myself, but for her: I promised to support her in comfort and respectability if she would only consent so to live; to be her friend till death if she would not urge me to take advantage of her friendlessness. But my words of wisdom were all lost upon her: her eyes streamed with tears: her hands were alternately clasped and clenched: she played off all the persuasive graces of woman when she implores; all the pretty pantomime of woman when she is slighted; until she and a very powerful feeling called Vanity (of which I have ever had too much to be a hero) gained the day. In one word, Julia Sherman threw herself upon my protection, and from that hour lived under it.

Stern moralists will doubtless blame the action,

but I was not a moralist at that period, and I saw no other course open to me. If I had loved the girl, it might have served as a palliative for the deed; but if I had loved her, I most assuredly should never have accepted her offer, and I believed that the shelter afforded her by my roof, at least, left Julia Sherman no excuse to join the God-forsaken thousands who roam our city every night. But let no one mistake the case for one of heartless seduction.

From that worst of social errors, which ruthlessly culling all the blooming promise of a young life, leaves nothing but blasted and arid plains behind, I hold myself, both in deed and purpose, entirely free.

CHAPTER XIX.

Two circumstances, occurring before the close of the season, were subjects of great annoyance to me. The first was, my discovery that the issue of the events related in the last chapter had become patent, heaven knows how, to my sisters Beatrice and Gertrude.

"Oh! yes, Master Gerald!" exclaimed the latter one day, with a would-be mysterious air, "*we* know the reason that you wouldn't invite poor Emmy to stay with you in Brook Street. You are determined to prevent your sisters ever taking you by surprise, that's very clear; only I think you might have thought of a less expensive method for effectually barricading your fortress against the presence of ladies."

"What do you mean?" I said, although I had already guessed it from her manner; "you are welcome to come to Brook Street whenever you choose: there is no reason that you should not do so" (as indeed there was not). But her words had discomposed me, and I felt that I changed colour.

"Just listen to Gerald, Beatrice," continued my vivacious sister; "he invites us to lunch with him in Brook Street to-morrow; will you be one of the party?"

Beatrice looked up from her work in solemn surprise, and regarded me fixedly.

"Is this true, Gerald?"

"*True!* what are you driving at?" I said testily.

"That we can go to see you in Brook Street?"

"Of course! what is to hinder you?"

"Only that we heard that you had increased your establishment more than is absolutely necessary for your requirements," and she bent her eyes again upon her work as she concluded.

"Well, then, you've heard wrong," I rejoined hotly; "I keep no more servants than are wanted for the size of the house."

"And you are incurring no needless expenses elsewhere, I hope?" she continued quietly. I was terribly tempted to swear, but I only answered:

"What possible concern can that be of yours, Beatrice?"

"It's no good being angry about it, my dear boy," she replied. "I do not expect you to be different from other people, only I do trust you will be careful and not become entangled in any way. I am a dozen years older than you are, remember; and I've seen a good deal of the world, so I feel I have a right to caution you. These little affairs are all very well in their way I suppose, as long as they don't go too far, but many a man has been ruined by them before now. I am very glad, however, to hear that you have had the sense not to spoil the letting of the house in Brook Street."

As my sister proceeded thus calmly, I was standing at one of the windows, with my back towards her, chafing under her warning, biting my lips, changing my feet, and wondering who the devil could have enlightened her in this manner as to my private affairs. Her voice ceased, and the mocking tones of Gertrude next took up the strain.

"Look at him, Beatrice, staring out of the window; he dare not look us in the face. Isn't he the picture of a naughty boy? Ah! you think we know *nothing*, Master Jerry; we poor women have no eyes or ears, have we? or sense either, for the matter of that; but we make the best use of what heaven has given us at all events."

"*Think!*" I exclaimed angrily, leaving my position by the window, — "I think you are *all* eyes and *all* ears, — and hear and see a great deal more than ever takes place. Pray who told you this confounded story about my doings in Brook Street?"

"It was repeated to us in confidence," replied Beatrice gently.

"Now! was he in a rage because he was found out, the dear old poppet!" said Gertrude, shaking her head in the most provoking manner; "and did he think his sisters were going to give up their authority, to be torn in pieces by an angry British lion?"

"Gertrude, for God's sake do try to talk sense. Beatrice, I must beg you won't repeat any of this folly down at Grasslands; Emmeline is not quite so *au fait* at discussing scandal as you and Gerty are, and I might not be able to enter on an explanation with her."

"Which you have done with us most fully," interposed Gertrude, who did not like the rebuke I had given her.

"I do not see that Gerald is in the least bound to give us an explanation, Gerty," remarked my elder sister, "and I think you were foolish to introduce the subject. As you had done so, I felt tempted to give him a little caution, but I am very sorry if I have

offended him. Do not let us say any more about it, Jerry; of course it is no business of ours."

"I should think not," I answered bluntly, but I felt that the discussion left me at a disadvantage, and that they knew almost as much about me as I did myself.

The other event to which I have alluded, as causing me annoyance, took place but two days before I left town for Grasslands. I had been to a large pic-nic at Richmond, which was to end with a dance, but I contracted such a violent headache from the combined effects of a glaring sun and inferior champagne, that I decided not to wait for the evening's amusement, and found my way home by myself. As I strolled along a street not far from the one in which my house was situated, I came suddenly upon the figure of —— Mrs. Sherman. I had so thoroughly believed in the death of this woman; placed such confidence in her daughter's accounts of her illness, her painful demise, and the expenses of her funeral, that her appearance was really like a resurrection from the dead to me. At first I could hardly speak to her, and her only desire seemed to be to elude my notice; but in a moment, all the deceit which had been practised on me flashed on my mind, and I grasped her unwilling arm.

"What are you doing here?" I exclaimed. "Is it by your design, or Julia's, that she has represented you to me as dead — that she has represented herself to be left without a friend or a home?"

She trembled so violently that she could not answer me, and I was so indignant that I would not give her time to collect herself.

"Wretched woman," I said, "it is not possible that

you can have pandered to your daughter's disgrace! Come back with me; I must confront you with one another. I will have a full explanation of this before we part."

The scene which ensued was a miserable one. The women accused each other of being the originator of the scheme, of which I certainly now appeared to be the victim; the daughter, of course, excused her assent, and all the consequent falsehoods, on the score of her love for myself; the mother pleaded her utter inability to control Julia when she had once set her heart upon a thing, and the upshot of their arguments proved nothing but that I had been regularly duped, and I began to doubt whether the feelings had not been assumed, as well as the pretence for their indulgence. Disgusted with the whole affair, I peremptorily dismissed Mrs. Sherman, forbidding her to appear under any roof for the rent of which I was liable, or to hold any communication (under present circumstances) with her daughter. She whined fearfully at my decree, saying it was very hard she should be entirely parted from her child, and that she had often told Julia that poverty was no evil so long as it was accompanied by virtue; and to think that Mr. S. should have deserted her, and her dear girls into the bargain, and that she was left to die alone. This was all very pathetic, but I was firm. I could not help regarding the part this woman must have played in the farce acted for my benefit as infinitely worse than that of her daughter. I felt no pity for her, no compassion; the very sight of her faded, hypocritical face was repugnant to me; and if Julia had insisted upon being allowed to see her mother I should have sent them both forth together.

But this little episode made me decide to leave town earlier than I had originally intended. I had received invitations to pass the autumn months at the country houses of Lord Portsdowne, the Lyndons, and the Claremonts; but an irresistible impulse took me down to Grasslands. I was sick and wearied of the artificial life by which I was surrounded, and longed to breathe a less demoralizing atmosphere; and as the train bore me every minute further from the dusty, smoke-dried town, into the green heart of Dorsetshire, I felt a new man. The sight of the apple-orchards by which we rushed, their trees weighed to the ground with rosy wealth; of the various dells, sunless and cool, with a carpet of fallen cones, from which graceful ferns and nodding foxgloves upreared their verdant heads; of the wide-spreading pastures, scattered over with grazing cattle; appealed to my senses as it had never done before. The freshness and the quiet of the country struck me, for the first time, as something necessary to my enjoyment; and as Emmeline drove me home from the station in her little basket carriage, I leaned back, quite at my ease, and thought how pleasant it would be to be driven through shady lanes and past cowslip-scented meadows for ever. The air was laden with sweet smells, the breath of cows, the hedges full of honeysuckle and wild roses; the fields of rich grass or waving corn, all seemed to add their *quota* to the general fragrance, until a languid dreamy influence stole over me, and Emmeline taxed me with want of communicativeness.

"Here have we been separated for more than three months, Gerald, and you have not a word to tell me of all you have been about."

"My dear child," I answered, "that is just what I have come down here to forget. Pray drop the subject of bricks and mortar altogether, and let us talk of nothing but buttercups and daisies during my stay at Grasslands. Tell me all about Marguerite and Ethel, the pigs, the stock and the poultry; but if you want information about operas, or balls, or dinner-parties, appeal to Beatrice or Gertrude, for I'm sick of every one of them. Figuratively speaking, I've brought down my slippers with me and don't intend to put on my dress boots till I go back again."

But although I was most anxious to keep thus quiet, the kindness of those families which had ranked themselves amongst my father's friends would not permit me to carry out my intention: and day after day, Emmy would laughingly display the cards which had been left upon me during my rambles, by the gentlemen of the various *ménages*, maliciously triumphing in the knowledge that I should be forced into society whether I would or no. One evening, on the return of Talbot and myself from a long ride across country, she came dancing into the hall to meet us, with six visiting cards held aloft in her hand.

"See!" she exclaimed, "what an honour you have brought upon us! The county member and his family, who have never thought of calling upon Colonel and Mrs. Talbot, bear down in full force as the master of Grasslands makes his appearance. Here they all are, Gerald. Lady Grafton, Sir Phillimore Grafton, Miss Grafton, Miss Ellen Grafton, Mr. Eustace Grafton, and two extra cards from the gentlemen for your especial benefit. What do you think of that? Oh! you naughty boy, don't swear!"

I am afraid there was some cause for Emmeline's last injunction. It was infinitely annoying to me, when I had calculated on a few months' perfect freedom, to find I was not my own master, but must stay to consider, before I laid a plan, whether courtesy did not demand my riding ten miles in one direction or fifteen in the other, to return the formal call of people for whose acquaintance I had not the least desire. Sir Phillimore Grafton had succeeded my father as member for Dorsetshire, and lived at a place called Lee, which lay between Grasslands and Wiversdale, and where in due course, in company with my sister, I returned the civility he had paid us, and found the family pleasant and hospitable but old-fashioned. Sir Phillimore looked more like a respectable farmer than a member of Parliament, and Lady Grafton was a helpmeet for him; the daughters were amiable but commonplace, the sons the same, and altogether I decided that one visit to Lee would suffice me a lifetime, though my sister voted me very uncharitable, and declared she had found them charming.

I reminded her that one man's meat is often another man's poison; but she maintained it was the morning call which had disgusted me; that I should have displayed a much better temper after stretching my legs under Sir Phillimore's mahogany, and tasting his crusty old port; that the only thing men ever cared for was a good dinner; and she believed all my talk about buttercups and daisies was sheer affectation.

I bore her reproaches in the spirit of martyrdom with which I was ever used to submit myself to my petty tyrants, even tacitly consenting to be written down a *gourmand;* notwithstanding which Mrs. Talbot

had a great deal of trouble, about ten days afterwards, in making me agree to send an answer in the affirmative to an invitation to dinner which had arrived for us all from Lady Grafton.

"My *dear* Emmeline," I remember saying on that occasion, "I positively can *not* undergo a whole evening at Lee. Just fancy to yourself what it will be, with the old man twaddling at the dinner-table, and the old woman twaddling upstairs; and 'She wore a wreath of roses' from one of the Miss Graftons, and then a drive of seven miles home at ten o'clock."

My sister burst out laughing at the pathos of my description. "Well! you won't hear them all at once, Jerry, and if you are with the old man at the dinner-table, it is certain you cannot be with the old woman upstairs; she will fall to my share. Besides, there will doubtless be other company; and they seem such kind people, that I dare say they have got up this party chiefly on your account; what do you say, Walter?" (this to her husband).

But Talbot would not commit himself by an opinion. He only shook his head and laughed.

"If you and Gerald go, Emmy, my dear, I'll go too; and if you stay at home, why — I think I shall stay at home."

"Oh! you stupid old thing!" exclaimed his wife; "I believe you are secretly in league with Gerald, and will strengthen him in his persuasion as soon as my back is turned, so I shall not leave him until he has decided what answer I am to send to Lady Grafton."

"Now, Emmy, what will be the use of going?" I asked, commencing to argue the matter.

"What will be the use of *not* going?" she said in return.

"There will be several uses, or rather gains. In the first place, comfort: in the second, a good pipe."

"Selfish, of course! but cannot you have a cigar there?"

"Thirdly, quiet: fourthly, freedom from the obligation of making oneself agreeable."

"An obligation which I expect you find rather difficult to put in force," interposed my sister pertly.

"Fifthly" — I was continuing, when she laid her hand on my mouth.

"Fifthly — you are just like all other men, and won't do as you are asked."

"Well! let me hear your arguments in favour of an opposite decision!"

"Sir Phillimore was a friend of papa's."

"That's one white ball for your side, I allow."

"The old people are as kind as can be; and the Miss Graftons are very nice, and will most likely improve on acquaintance."

"Humph! — I can't quite agree with you there."

"I dare say you'll get a much better dinner than I shall give you at home."

"I am afraid that consideration would not weigh with me much, Emmy, notwithstanding you are so certain that an Englishman cares for nothing but his meals."

"Well! you may meet your fate there."

At this I could not restrain myself from laughing.

"My *fate*, you simpleton! I am my own fate, and were I not, I don't think I should seek her at Sir Phillimore Grafton's. However, I suppose this all

means that I must go, whether I wish it or not: so you can write and accept for us all."

Emmeline said I was a "darling," and would be rewarded for my virtue: I considered my assent in the light of a great weakness, and was only consoled by the idea that even country dinner parties did not last for ever.

At one time it seemed as if my reward had come before my sacrifice, for I was very nearly prevented from going altogether. On the afternoon of the day we were engaged to Lee, Emmeline and I had just returned from a stroll in the garden, when she slipped on the steps which led to the hall-door and strained her ankle. It was not a serious accident, and one which a few days' rest would probably set to rights, but she could not put her foot to the ground that evening, which of course precluded all idea of her going out to dinner. Talbot, who of late years had quite given up the habit of going into society, and who appeared only too pleased to get off the present engagement, immediately expressed his intention of staying with his wife, and I thought it an admirable opportunity for displaying my fraternal affection by remaining at home also. The face of Emmeline, when we announced to her our joint determination, was a study.

"What! *both* of you?" she exclaimed, looking from one to the other in positive distress. "Oh! this will never do! What would the Graftons think? You could not make a greater fuss if I were dangerously ill. Pray go, Walter; Marguerite and I will be capital company for each other, and I shall retire early to bed."

"My dear, I could not think of such a thing," replied Talbot, with comical gravity.

"And my anxiety is too great to permit of my leaving home," I added, with equal solemnity.

"Now Gerald is only hocussing you, Emmy," said my brother-in-law, exposing my little weakness with needless severity. "There is no earthly reason why *he* should not go to Lee, but my case is very different."

"There is no reason why you should not both go," replied my sister decidedly; "but one of you certainly must, and it ought to be Gerald: he knows we were only asked because of himself."

I protested, and argued, and even entreated without any avail: Emmeline was firm in declaring that her sprained ankle had nothing whatever to do with my engagement to the Graftons, and for the honour of the family I was bound to keep it. *La langue des femmes est leur épée, et elles ne la laissent pas rouiller.* As usual in such cases, when my adversary was of the softer sex, I went to the wall and proved amenable. Talbot was a tougher subject; all his wife's eloquence was wasted on him; and at seven o'clock I alighted at the seat of Sir Phillimore Grafton, alone. The company, a larger one than I had anticipated meeting, was already assembled when I arrived, and as I made apologies for the non-appearance of my sister and her husband, Lady Grafton's lamentations over Emmeline's accident were heard all over the room.

"Dear, dear, Mr. Estcourt, you don't mean to say so — strained her ankle? how very distressing! Sir Phillimore, you will be grieved to hear we are not to have the pleasure of Colonel and Mrs. Talbot's com-

pany to-night. Dear Mrs. Talbot has hurt her ankle" (everybody was "dear" with Lady Grafton after the first interview). "How did it happen, Mr. Estcourt? Slipped on the steps, you say? dear! dear! Poor thing, what a sad occurrence! I hope you sent for medical assistance. Did your dear sister assume the recumbent posture at once? Ah! that was right! but I am truly sorry it should have happened; we were quite looking forward to meeting her again. This makes our second *contretemps* to-night. A dear young friend staying in the house has been suddenly attacked with pains in the head, and will be unable to join us at dinner, though I trust she may do so afterwards. Yes, so very distressing, you know, and so unexpected. Sings charmingly, but I am almost afraid we shall not hear her this evening: too great a tax perhaps — yes; such a sad disappointment for all. Quite ready, Sir Phillimore: Mr. Estcourt, will you take down my eldest daughter?"

Laden with Miss Grafton (who certainly seemed very good-natured, if talking of nothing but Emmeline's ankle during the whole of dinner-time could be taken in proof of the fact), I wended my way down the broad old-fashioned staircase of Lee, and into the sombrely-furnished dining-room, where the courses were as heavy as the plate, and the conversation as slow as the movements of the antiquated servants. Trying to escape from Emmeline's ankle, which I had worn to the very bone, my eyes wandered up and down the long damask-covered table in order to find out of what stamp of people my feeding neighbours were composed. I saw at a glance they were just such as I might have expected to meet at the Graftons. Clergy-

men and their wives; rollicking country gentlemen; dowdy country spinsters; with here and there a solemn-looking youngster, or a raw-looking girl, to whom such dissipations were evidently few and far between and invested with due awe.

I tried to talk and make myself agreeable to Miss Grafton, but she had not been to town that season; and each familiar topic fell still-born from my mouth, whilst my sister's ankle invariably rose from its ashes, and a few more interesting particulars were extracted from me on that subject. I fear relief must almost have been depicted on my countenance as at last the ladies left the dining-room, and I drew my chair up to the table, and attempted to break the ice which had hitherto existed between myself and the man who sat next me. He was a frank, pleasant fellow of the name of Townshend, who proved to have been well known to my father; and in making his acquaintance I recovered my spirits, and ceased to remember how I had been bored. Sir Phillimore Grafton conducted his after-dinner parties in the old-fashioned way, pledging his guests separately, and inducing them by every means in his power to sit long, and not to spare the wine. Most of the men then present were such as readily responded to his invitation; and having no inducement to do otherwise, I remained with them until they proposed an adjournment. It was past ten o'clock before we went upstairs; as we did so, the sound of singing was heard from the drawing-room, which consisted of two apartments, in the further of which was placed the piano. I entered the front one, and throwing myself on a chair by the side of my friend Miss Grafton, composed myself to silence until the song should be

concluded. The singer was hid from my sight, but I was immediately attracted by the voice: a soft, rich contralto, without one harsh or rugged tone, in which the simple, native notes were being sung.

"Who is singing?" I demanded, in a low whisper, of Miss Grafton.

"A friend of ours," she returned, with the same caution. "She was not at the dinner-table. She has been ill."

I then remembered the circumstance related to me by my hostess on my arrival, and concluded this lady must be the one she had mentioned.

"Her voice does not sound as if she were ill," I remarked.

"No; her head is better now."

"May I ask her name?"

"Mrs. Penryhn."

Hitherto our conversation had been conducted in the discreetest of whispers, but at this communication of Miss Grafton's I repeated aloud —

"*What* name did you say?"

"Mrs. Saville Penryhn: she was a Miss Rivers. She is an old friend of ours; we were at school together in Paris."

"Is her husband here?" I demanded quickly. A strange sensation was beginning to creep over me, and my voice sounded thick in my own ears. Miss Grafton's round eyes opened to their widest.

"Her husband, Mr. Estcourt? oh, dear no! she is a widow. Mr. Penryhn died more than a year ago."

Starting from my seat with a rapidity which, if she thought at all upon the subject, must have greatly

astonished my amiable informant, I pressed forward to the curtained arch which divided the two apartments, and gazed once more upon the face of her who had been Ada Rivers.

CHAPTER XX.

After a lapse of three years, during which I had been endeavouring to persuade myself that I had forgotten her! She had ceased singing, but was still seated at the piano, robed in a high white dress of some very thin material, the simplicity of which at once struck me; and as she sat with the full light upon her face, she appeared so little changed that Time melted into Nothingness, and there was a music in my ears as of summer waves breaking upon a shore of shingles. A film passed before my eyes as I gazed upon her; a tremulous action long unknown to me seemed to communicate itself to every nerve; above the confusion of tongues and the wild drawing-room applause I could have counted the beating of my heart. Had I ever experienced such feelings before? Yes; once, and once only; years and years ago; at a little place called Freshwave; when I loved. By the very novelty of the almost forgotten sensation, I felt that, since we parted, no woman had had the power to stir me thus. Was the agitation I experienced at sight of her but the ghost of the powerful feeling I had conquered, invoked by a recollection of the past, or was it the enemy himself, who had been subdued but not annihilated, and now rose up to warn me of my danger? Scarcely had I had time, however, to feel surprise at the fact that her presence made me tremble, when she left the instrument and moved towards the

spot where I was standing. As she advanced, she caught my eyes fixed upon her, and by the vivid blush which dyed her cheek, I saw that I was recognized.

"Am I quite forgotten, Mrs. Penryhn?" I stammered, as we met.

"Oh, no; not at all," she answered, hurriedly; and as she placed her hand in mine, her eyes for a moment flashed upon me and then sought the ground; "that is, you have not been long in England, have you?"

"Only a few months. I returned last April."

"Indeed!" With apparent uncertainty she was about to pass on, when she stopped again, and said, formally —

"I hope your sisters and the rest of your family are well."

"Quite so, thank you! I trust you have recovered from your headache."

"Oh, yes," nervously plucking at her glove.

"My dear Ada, you sang *charmingly*," now interposed the voice of Lady Grafton. "I am sure it is exceedingly good of you to have exerted yourself so, and after such a headache as you have had. I hope it will be none the worse for your kindness. Now, will you have a glass of wine, or a cup of coffee? Oh! you must take something after your exertions. Quite a treat, I'm sure, yes. We do not often hear such singing at Lee. Now, do sit down in the easy-chair and rest yourself; you must be quite fatigued, yes. Mr. Romsey, Mrs. Penryhn will take a glass of water; that bell. Thank you; thank you very much. Yes. We must take care of our dear friend, after all her efforts to amuse us. Mr. Clarke, will you fetch a footstool

for Mrs. Penryhn? Now, my dear Ada, I will hear no objections. I insist upon your resting yourself, or you may have a return of your headache, yes." And trying to look infinitely grateful under the weight of her obligations, Mrs. Penryhn suffered herself to be propped up before and behind, and made completely uncomfortable by the pressing attentions of her over-zealous hostess.

In the meanwhile I leaned against the side of the archway, with something very like depression stealing over my spirits. Her vacillating, uncertain manner, so unlike the composure with which she formerly behaved to me; the hurry of her words, which almost amounted to brusqueness, equally puzzled me. Had she an objection to meet me again? was the remembrance of my boldness at our last interview, of my perseverance in addressing her after she had requested me not to do so, unpleasant to her? and did she fear a renewal of attentions which she had regarded more in the light of an impertinence than an honour? I watched her for some time after she had been seated in state by Lady Grafton, but her head never turned my way by so much as an inch, and my eyes only rested on the delicate line of her slender white throat, and the woven mass of brown hair by which it was surmounted. She was talking in a sufficiently lively manner with the man whom Lady Grafton had called by the name of Romsey, and seemed perfectly free from the nervous hesitation which she had evinced when addressing myself. I felt ruffled at the comparison, and abruptly leaving my position, again took up one by the side of Miss Grafton, who had wandered into the next room.

"What did he die of, Miss Grafton?"

Until she looked up in my face and laughed I had no idea how absurd I was making myself by permitting the train of thought which occupied my mind to burst forth in this manner without any previous explanation.

"Who, which, when, and how, Mr. Estcourt?" This was the sole attempt at vivacity ever known to issue from the lips of Miss Grafton, and Townshend told me afterwards that she had heard him say it a minute before.

"I must really beg your pardon," I observed in answer. "I should have premised that I was thinking of Mr. Penryhn."

"Did you know him?"

"No; but my father was intimate with her family."

"Then you have met Ada before."

"Yes; some years ago — prior to her marriage."

"How strange that she should not have mentioned it, for she knew you were coming to-night; and she was staying with us when you and Mrs. Talbot called the week before last."

"Indeed! but our personal acquaintance is slight, and of so remote a date, that I could scarcely have dared to hope that Mrs. Penryhn would remember me." Notwithstanding which assertion I felt stung to the quick by Miss Grafton's innocent revelations.

"And did you not even know that she was a widow?"

"No. I must have been in Spain at the time, when I interested myself very little about what occurred at home."

"He died very suddenly at his shooting-box in Wales, I do not know from what cause. Papa says he was a very imprudent young man, and none of us

liked him much. I always wondered how Ada could have married him."

"And she has been very disconsolate since, I suppose."

"I don't think so," replied Miss Grafton, smiling. "You know she is a very honest, straightforward girl, and would disdain to use any pretence of feeling. She was very quiet at first, of course, but she seems all right again now. She never cared much about society, though."

"Where is Colonel Rivers living at present?"

"In Scotland, I think. His wife had some property left her there. Perhaps you know he married for the third time just before Ada did. The younger girls are all put to school."

Armed with this further information, I ventured after a while to creep away from the vicinity of Miss Grafton and approach that of Mrs. Penryhn. How all things seemed to change as I drew near her! The man Romsey had left her at last, and she was thoughtfully tearing to pieces a little bunch of flowers which she had worn in her waistband.

"How destructive you ladies are," I said, with a view to opening the conversation. She started slightly to find I was so close to her, and smiled as she replied —

"It is mischief found for idle hands to do. There is this excuse for destroying flowers, however, they soon fall to pieces of themselves if we do not help them to do so."

"Do you lay that flattering unction to your soul with regard to all your works of destruction, Mrs. Penryhn?"

She looked at me gravely. For the first time since our meeting I obtained a full view of her eyes. How large and clear and soft and womanly they were! And yet I fancied there was something gone from them since I had seen them last; something come into them which had not been there before. Yet the eyes which had gazed over the Channel waters had ever been full of thought.

"I hope I never intentionally destroy anything that is worthy of preservation, Mr. Estcourt."

"Not even a memory. Have you then forgotten Freshwave? It was a stupid little place, I allow, but I think its very freshness and simplicity entitle it to an occasional thought. I know I often think of it."

Again that vivid blush which had so startled me on her recognition of myself, but it was the only answer she made to my inquiry. Fearing I had annoyed her by the allusion, I hastened to another subject.

"I hope my little friends Georgie and Flora and Louie are all quite well. Miss Grafton tells me they are at school."

She recovered herself immediately.

"Quite well, thank you, and growing such big girls: Georgina really promises to be very pretty, and we expect she will make quite a sensation on her *début*. I suppose the honour of introducing her will fall on me, for papa has lived almost entirely in Scotland since his marriage."

"And yourself, Mrs. Penryhn?"

"I live in London."

"So do I," I answered quickly.

"I thought Lady Grafton told me you had a place near here."

"Yes; but I cannot live in the country all the year round in single blessedness."

"Not married yet, then, Mr. Estcourt." She put the question with an assumption of ignorance, but she was perfectly aware I was not.

"No, Mrs. Penryhn, nor likely to be. I was in no hurry to follow your example."

"Why, what would my sisters have done for a *chaperon* else?" she said, trying to turn the conversation lightly; "I shall be a first-rate one now, by the time they come out."

"Shall you? Well, don't send them down to Freshwave then; for it's a dangerous place; and what is sport to some, is death to others. They have a very good proverb in Spain, Mrs. Penryhn, *Puerta abierta, al santo tiento* — The open door tempts the saint; and there is little doubt that time and opportunity work more mischief in this world than we can ever prevent by the force of what we call our will. I have had very bitter experience of this in my day."

Before she had space to recover from the confusion into which my words had evidently thrown her, one or two ladies rose from their seats, and in another minute the whole room was astir, and thanks and farewells were being exchanged by the dozen. In the midst of the general *mêlée* I managed to lean over the arm-chair, and say in a low voice: —

"Shall you stay here long?"

"I am engaged to spend the autumn at Lee."

"I am so glad to hear it."

She did not lift her eyes as we parted, but I ven-

tured to press the hand she gave me ever so softly, and I did not think it was withdrawn quicker than it would otherwise have been; so having at last torn myself away in the midst of a fresh volley of lamentations over Emmeline's ankle on the part of my indefatigable hostess, I threw myself back in the carriage which conveyed me home, with a sigh which sounded much more like a note of content than one of relief.

What were my feelings — my ideas — my wishes on the subject? I could not tell. I only knew that I had asked this woman for her love three years ago, when she was neither free to give it, nor I to make my choice in marriage; and that we had met again, under completely altered circumstances, with my tastes unchanged and hers perhaps still to form. How should we act towards one another? with what intentions should I approach her? for that my present sense of happiness emanated from the prospect of meeting her again I did not attempt to deny.

It was useless to pretend to search my heart for an answer: I knew full well, although I could not at once acknowledge, to what my freshly-springing hopes tended. I had believed so thoroughly that I had trodden down my love for Ada Rivers, that if I never experienced so deep a feeling for any other woman, it was impossible the old affection could be revived, that it was sufficient matter for surprise to find myself compelled to acknowledge its undying power directly I was brought again by chance within the range of her influence. Casting my eye backward over the events of the last three years, I should have found it hard work to reckon up all the women I had flirted with; romanced to; even imagined I had loved — yet, which

of them had excited in me more than a passing desire — a momentary regret? There was but one woman in the world whose loss had darkened my future; made life appear worthless to me; and drawn tears from my eyes in the bitterness of my disappointment; and that woman I had seen to-night; still young, still beautiful; and better than both or either, *free*. My pulses quickened at the thought; my heart leapt; my blood burned; I no longer attempted to deceive myself. I knew I loved her; I knew I had never ceased to love her — that I should never cease to wish her mine.

The knowledge seemed to dawn upon me as on one who discovers he has been in possession of a treasure without knowing it. I was half wild with delight: the more I thought upon the past, the present, and the future, the more hopeful I became; and when I retired to my bed, it was but to spend a few sleepless hours, dreaming waking dreams of Ada Penryhn; seeing her as she had appeared upon the beach of Freshwave; in the cave at Crompton Bay; under the moonlight in the hotel garden; reviving all my dearest recollections of that hallowed time, and mixing them with a glowing picture of what might yet be; at the contemplation of which, my excitement knew no bounds. It is all very well to laugh at the magician Love, but we have good reason to fear his spells, were it only for the power he possesses to force us to make fools of ourselves. Fearful lest I should betray the feelings which held me captive, the next morning found me more than usually uncommunicative. Emmeline had managed to limp down to breakfast, and it required a great amount of perseverance on her part to extract anything but monosyllables from me.

"Now, Gerald, you are too provoking," she at last exclaimed. "You made such a virtue of going to Lee yesterday, that the least thing I expected was to hear you abuse the whole entertainment."

"That would be very ungracious, would it not?" I said.

"Of course it would: I only remarked it was what I expected, but you are mysterious as the unfathomable Sphynx."

"What mystery is it that you wish to unravel?"

"Who did you take down to dinner?"

"Miss Grafton."

"The fat one?"

"I really can't say — it was the eldest."

"Oh! the other has much the most to say for herself; well, what did you have for dinner?"

"My dear Emmy, do you really expect me to give you the whole *carte?* I forgot to learn it by heart."

"You can at least say whether it was a good dinner or a bad one. How many guests were there?"

"About twenty I should say."

"Any nice girls?"

"No; none that I saw."

"Poor fellow! any young people of any sort?"

"Very few; the company was chiefly composed of old married couples."

"Did they sing after dinner?"

"One lady did."

"Who was she?"

"A Mrs. Penryhn."

"Young or old?"

"Rather young."

"Pretty?"

"That's according to taste."

"Sing well?"

"Yes; very fairly."

"What is her husband like?"

"She has none: she is a widow."

"Oh! a widow; fat, fair, and forty, I suppose; has she lots of money, Jerry?"

"I didn't ask her, Emmy."

"Oh dear! how stupid you men are; there is no getting anything out of you."

"Rather, how inquisitive you women are! and what a deal of talking you manage to extract from nothing."

"Now do you mean to say that's all you intend to tell me about Lady Grafton's dinner?"

"I have nothing further to tell."

"Then you were not so bored as you anticipated."

"I am not aware what I said to convey that impression."

"Oh, Walter! *do* listen to the way that Gerald is going on," said my sister, teased out of all patience. "I believe that my prophecy came true, and he met his fate in the fat widow; and proposed, and was rejected before the evening was over, and that's the reason he is so cross this morning."

"You've hit the truth at last, Emmy," I said, as I rose and pushed away my chair from the breakfast table, "so I hope you will rest satisfied with your discovery, and absolve me from any more catechisms. What are you going to do this morning, Talbot? I feel inclined for nothing but a good scamper across country. By Jove! I wish September would make its appearance."

The next two days went very slowly for me. Doubtless they also did so for poor Emmeline, as her strained ankle did not recover itself so quickly as we had anticipated, and continued to give pain whenever she attempted to put her foot to the ground. On the third morning, as early as I could, I announced at the luncheon table my intention of riding over to Lee, and leaving my card upon the Graftons.

"The thing *must* be done," I said, affecting to make a virtue of the necessity, "and therefore the sooner it is over the better, particularly as I shall not have much inclination to spend my days dancing after old women when the shooting season has commenced."

But my sister was very urgent that I should wait until she could accompany me.

"My ankle is sure to be well in another day or two, Gerald; indeed it is much better this morning, and scarcely pains me at all; and it is hardly worth while for us to make separate journeys to Lee."

"I can leave your cards for Lady Grafton," I answered, curtly. I was not overpleased at the idea of being deterred from making my visit alone.

"But what occasion is there for any hurry?" asked Emmeline innocently; "it is not a week since you dined there, and people in the country, and at such a distance, never expect etiquette to be kept up with regard to formal calls."

"I have not been reared in the country, you see."

"But you will wait for me, dear Gerald, won't you? I should so much enjoy going in your company, and I know it can make no difference to you. Or, if you would like it better, I could even drive over by myself and leave your card. I am sure Lady Grafton would

excuse any ceremony, and she must know that seven miles is a long distance for a young man to go to make a morning call."

Anathematizing my dear sister's innocence and pertinacious desire to save me trouble, I flung myself out of the house on that occasion, in a humour which ill requited her patient affection for myself; and mounting my horse, rode out of Grasslands without any particular object except to drive away my dissatisfaction. The fact is, I was burning to see Ada Penryhn again: I had thought of little else, night and day, since I had met her; but I was too fearful that the women's wits (never so sharp as in an *affaire du cœur*) would penetrate my secret if I suffered myself, by look or word, to betray my anxiety to revisit Lee. So I rode off disappointed and slightly sulky, blaming my cowardice in not doing exactly as I felt inclined; and yet not dreaming of acting in any way which could excite suspicion until I found myself some miles nearer the seat of Sir Phillimore Grafton than I had imagined I could be. Then an irresistible desire took possession of me; and setting spurs to my horse, I galloped without further thought to Lee, and found myself inquiring if the family was at home, almost before I had made up my mind whether I should call on them or not. The ladies were "in," however; and I was shown into an empty drawing-room to await their advent. In a few minutes, the servant who had admitted me returned to say that "the young ladies" were in the garden — pointing, as he spoke, to an open French window, through which might be seen a wide-spreading lawn sprinkled over with shady trees — and would I be pleased to join them there.

I would be pleased: I did not consider it worth while to tell John how much; and taking up my hat, I prepared to do as he proposed. Before I stepped out, however, upon the gravelled terrace beneath the window, I paused for a moment to contemplate the scene before me; perhaps, who knows! to try to regulate a little that rebellious blood which, if I could judge from what I felt, was coursing over my features as though I had been a woman. The garden at Lee was one of those charming plantations which have been in existence for years, and brought to such a state of perfection, that it seems as though there is nothing left to be done which could possibly improve them. The turf was short and thick, and soft as velvet pile; not a weed; not a morsel of moss; not a pebble was permitted to disfigure it from end to end; and even beneath the ancient mulberry-trees by which the lawn was bordered, and at which Sir Phillimore was wont to grumble as destroying the grass by their vicinity and shade, it seemed to thrive as well as in most open places. Two mighty cedars of Lebanon, like gigantic sentinels, swept it with their branches at either end, and formed its boundary; and beyond them the eye lost itself in masses of umbrageous vegetation, amongst which rustic seats and benches were placed at intervals. As I gazed from the open window, I caught the sound of laughter from amidst the clustering trees, and glimpses of variously coloured dresses as the wearers moved to and fro, apparently engaged in some out-door amusement. The wafted sounds of mirth were too tempting to be listened to at such a distance, particularly as I fancied that I could distinguish *her* voice amongst the others; so leaving the deserted drawing-room I walked rapidly

across the lawn to the spot whence the sounds proceeded, and was soon in the midst of a very merry if not very wise assembly. Lying on a bench surrounding a mulberry-tree, which must have numbered several centuries, with her garden hat over her eyes, and a book in her hand, was the eldest Miss Grafton, whilst her younger sister was being chased round and round the trunk by a couple of mischievous little nephews. Two nurses, in bright-coloured cotton dresses, which had greatly added to the warmth of the picture from a distance, were seated quietly at work near at hand; whilst a vacant perambulator, and sundry other articles of infantine use, showed I had hit upon a veritable nursery party. As I came upon them, Miss Grafton could scarcely have evinced more horrified confusion if a shell had suddenly been thrown in her lap.

"Ellen, Ellen!" she exclaimed, leaping off the bench, "here is Mr. Estcourt."

"Pray do not let me disturb you," I said with genuine vexation at creating such a commotion.

"Mr. Estcourt must take us as he finds us," interposed a rich sweet voice which was not that of Ellen Grafton, "and that is more in the character of nurserymaids than anything else."

I turned at the longed-for sound, and saw Ada Penryhn before me. Her light muslin dress was crushed and torn from the roughness of the children's play; her tangled hair was half over her face and half down her back; and sitting astride on her shoulders, a little foot clasped in either hand, she held an infant of about a twelvemonth old. Flushed, smiling, but eminently graceful, she advanced to meet me.

"I have not a hand to offer you, Mr. Estcourt, as you can see; you must shake one of Willie's instead."

Hand or no hand, I would have been well content, might I have stood and gazed at her for ever. She recalled to my mind a sculptured marble by Canova, of a Nymph and Infant Bacchus, which I had met with in my wanderings through Rome.

I knew now why that particular statue had so taken my fancy that I had stood before it, day after day, in silent admiration of its beauty.

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